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1st - 15th June 2021

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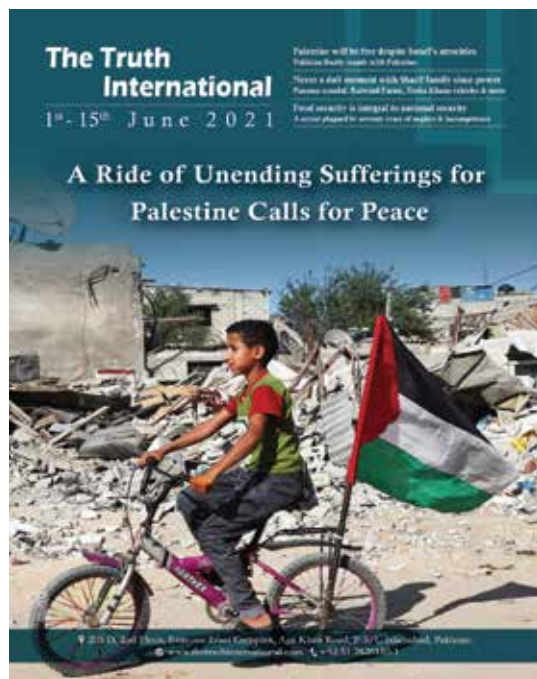
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On the Cover

The bloodshed has abated but the crisis continues. A fortnight's bloody escalation in the long-simmering tension between Israel and the Palestinians ended quite suddenly with a ceasefire that, at the moment, seems to be mostly holding.

Palestine Will Be Free by Ibrahim Moiz – **Page 07**



Editorial

"Israel is fighting the shadow of its own colonial enterprise" by M. Ziauddin – **Page 05**

CITY NOTES: Fighting for survival by M.A. Niazi – **Page 06**

Palestine Unsettled Issue

The One-Sided War by Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri – **Page 09**



OIC: Oh, I See! by Mishaal Ashraf – **Page 12**

Pakistan Stands with Palestine Forever by Zainab Umer – **Page 13**

COVID-19

Lockdown Easing After Averting Super-Spreader Eid by Noor Aftab – **Page 16**



Politics

The same page smudged? By Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 18**

Is PMLN Mending Fences with Establishment? By Zain Rihat – **Page 19**



Investigation

Is the Ring Road Scandal A Case of Wolf Crying Wolf? By Azeem Waqas – **Page 21**

Bahria Town Karachi and its Influential Patrons By Hamza Qureshi – **Page 23**

Détente or Escalation? By Ahmad Waleed – **Page 24**

Is Punjab Trying to Wrest Sharifs' Jati Umra Estate? By Shahid Hussain – **Page 26**

A Brief History of Raiwind Farmhouses by Sattar Khan – **Page 28**



Economy

The Brewing Scam of Online Trading by Fahad Thaheem – Page 34



Govt Achieves “Mission Impossible” As External Economy Shows Signs of Improvement by Javed Mahmood – Page 36

Budget Set to Bring Economic Stimulus by Khaliq Ahmad – Page 38

Food Security is National Security, says PM’s Agri Czar by Palwasha Khattak – Page 40

Foreign Affairs

Taliban May Bring Their Own Peace Plan to Istanbul by Tahir Khan – Page 42

Is Russia Nudging Pakistan and India to Play Ball? By Umer Farooq – Page 44



The Inimitable Farooq Qaiser Is No More by Kokub Jehan – Page 46

Pakistan Festivals

Serenity is Chilim Jusht in the Time of Covid-19 by Zahiruddin – Page 48

Sports

PSL-6 Set to Add Sizzle to the Summer by Ali Abdullah – Page 50



Turf War by Asad Malik – Page 51

Entertainment

Rendezvous with Rising Star Amar Khan by Hasan Kazami – Page 52

Book Review

Dracula, Phenomenal Future Stories by Alizay Ashraf – Page 55

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“Israel is fighting the shadow of its own colonial enterprise”

By M. Ziauddin



Israeli police raided against the Al-Aqsa mosque on the holy night of Laylat al-Qadr, firing stun grenades and rubber-tipped bullets at one of the holiest sites of Islam where protest demonstrations were being staged driven by anger over the looming evictions of Palestinian families from the Sheikh Jarrah neighborhood of east Jerusalem for making room for Israeli settlers.

Hamas had retaliated by launching over 4,000 rockets at Israel during the 11-day ‘war’. Israel struck back with destructive air-raids against Gaza. In the ensuing one-sided military contest 248 Palestinians, including 60 children lost their lives, Gaza was turned into rubbles and some 12 Israelis had perished on the other side.

Almost the entire world came out protesting against the Israeli atrocities. The UN General Assembly passed resolutions condemning Israel. The UNSC attempted twice to sanction Israel, but the threat of US Veto saved the day for Tel Aviv. However, the one protest that was expected to be the loudest, remained almost inaudible throughout the Israeli mayhem---the anticipated protest of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), plus that of the Arab League and the Gulf Cooperation Council. It was not heard because it had already been choked by the UAE, Morocco, Sudan and Bahrain---the four countries that recognized Israel only a couple of months’ back--- dealing a seeming death blow to the two-state solution.

Israel was born out the infamous Balfour Declaration announced in 1917 supporting the establishment of a “national home for the Jewish people” in Palestine, then an Ottoman region with a small minority Jewish population.

The British government later confirmed that the words “in Palestine” meant that the Jewish national home was not intended to cover all of Palestine. In 2017 they finally recognized that the Declaration should have called for protection of the Palestinian Arabs’ political rights. But too late. By then

the ‘forever’ Israeli–Palestinian conflict had become a bleeding wound in what has come to be described as the world’s most intractable conflict.

The Palestinian evictions are based in part on a doubtful 1970 Israeli law that allows Jews to “reclaim” East Jerusalem land “owned by Jews before 1948”. But no similar law exists for Palestinians who lost their homes in what is now Israel to the Zionist terrorism in 1948 and fled to what was then Jordanian-controlled territory.

The ‘state of Israel’ could continue to forcibly evict the Palestinians from their land, thanks largely to the US for the \$3.8 billion aid package it delivers annually to Israel—which goes almost entirely toward military assistance and is not conditioned on Israel’s compliance with international humanitarian law. This package also included \$1.6 billion specifically for building the anti-missile Iron Dome batteries and interceptors.

Within the bounds of Israel itself, Arab citizens are discriminated against on racial grounds in a systematic manner that is increasingly being described as apartheid. As the protests in Jerusalem unfolded, Palestinians living in areas that are ‘Israeli’ by the logic of partition erupted in support of Sheikh Jarrah, as they did in the West Bank and the diaspora.

As Palestinians staged protests in Israel, burned tyres, attacked Jews and torched synagogues, the Jewish mobs, in many cases protected by state security forces, roved around cities, attacking and lynching Palestinians in the street or trying to break into their homes.

Just as Sheikh Jarrah’s residents are being dispossessed today, many Palestinian citizens of Israel saw their land and property expropriated by the newly created state seventy years ago. Today, more than 93 per cent of land in Israel is controlled by the Israeli Land Administration, most of it allocated to Jews.

Today the two communities are so intertwined that to fully separate them has become unrealistic, if not actually impossible. Fatefully, more than 7.3 million Palestinian Arabs live—either as citizens in Israel or as noncitizens in the West Bank, Gaza, and East Jerusalem—alongside nearly 6.8 million Israeli Jews. Palestinian Arab fertility rates (4.3 children per woman in the West Bank and 4.5 children per woman in Gaza) far outstrip the Israeli Jewish average of 3.1 children per woman.

Time ripe for Palestinian leaders to present the international community with two options: either come up with a credible plan for achieving a two-state solution within a realistic and short time frame (before Israel completely ‘cleanses’ its land of all Arabs) or vigorously support the Palestinian struggle for equality within one democratic state.

Several academic and Track II diplomacy exercises have already suggested models for a single state—from a liberal, one-person-one-vote model that Israel is sure to reject, to a binational, federal model in which different ethnic groups share power while maintaining some degree of political autonomy. Israel will need to evolve, they argue, into a secular state that protects the rights of all citizens, regardless of religion or origin.

At Israel’s illegitimate founding, the country’s first prime minister, David Ben-Gurion, warned about Palestinian refugees. “We must do everything to ensure they never do return,” he said. “The old will die, and the young will forget.”

He was wrong about the young.

As the conflict escalated last week, a manifesto circulated online for the “Unity Intifada,” calling for a united uprising of Palestinians from Gaza, the West Bank, Jerusalem, inside Israel, and the millions of Palestinians in refugee camps and diaspora communities globally. “This Intifada will be a long one,” the manifesto said, “in the streets of Palestine and in streets around the world.”

CITY NOTES: Fighting for survival

By M.A. Niazi



There are many impressions created by the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, not least the posturing by so many. Perhaps the main posturing has come from the ending of the conflict, with Palestinians taking to the streets in joy at its end by the IDF-Hamas truce. The Palestinians were flashing victory signs. Over here, it's not so much a symbol of victory as of defiance, being flashed by politicians and political workers after arrest, and most typically flashed when they are being loaded onto a police van, on the way to prison.

In a way, perhaps the Palestinians were right to flash it. After all, it meant that they were being made to face the prison that are the occupied territories. Pakistan's Parliament came up with a brilliant solution. They would send a medical mission.

The most famous medical mission I can think of is the one led by Dr Ansari to Turkey in 1913, during the Third Balkan War, which was organised by the students of Aligarh. That was one of the central

moments in the Pakistan Movement, and incidentally is one of the reasons Turkey looks with such friendship on Pakistan. But I can't help thinking that while a medical mission might be a bold step for people under colonial rule (and while the colonial power looked askance at the country being helped), I'm not sure a state which pledges to aspire to be Riasat-e-Medina will win much praise with merely a medical mission.

You might remember, during World War I, when the colonial power and the caliphate appeared on different sides, there was not even a medical mission. Indeed, when the Ali Brothers tried to stir trouble among the troops being sent to the Middle East to point out that they should not fight the caliph, they were put on trial. However, when Pakistan was created, there were a number of medical missions. Staffed, but of course, by the only institution to retain its integrity, the army. All those earthquakes in Turkey and Iran had Pakistani field hospitals going pretty quick.

But a medical mission was not entirely on the government's mind, after PM's Adviser on Overseas Pakistanis, Zulfi Bokhari resigned because his name cropped up in the Rawalpindi Ring Road scandal. Aviation Minister Ghulam Sarwar Khan's name appeared, but he didn't resign. Nor did the Commissioner Rawalpindi at the time, but that can be understood. I mean, Bokhari will merely be reappointed, but you resign from a civil service job, and

that's it. No reappointment, even if your name is cleared. Even if you go on leave, there's no restoration of your leave period if you're cleared.

Bokhari will be cleared. Before him, Dr Babar Awan, Aleem Khan and yes, Bokhari himself, were cleared, in various scandals. Bokhari is also supposed to have been instrumental in getting a returning pilgrim from Iran out of quarantine last year, and thus letting covid-19 into the country.

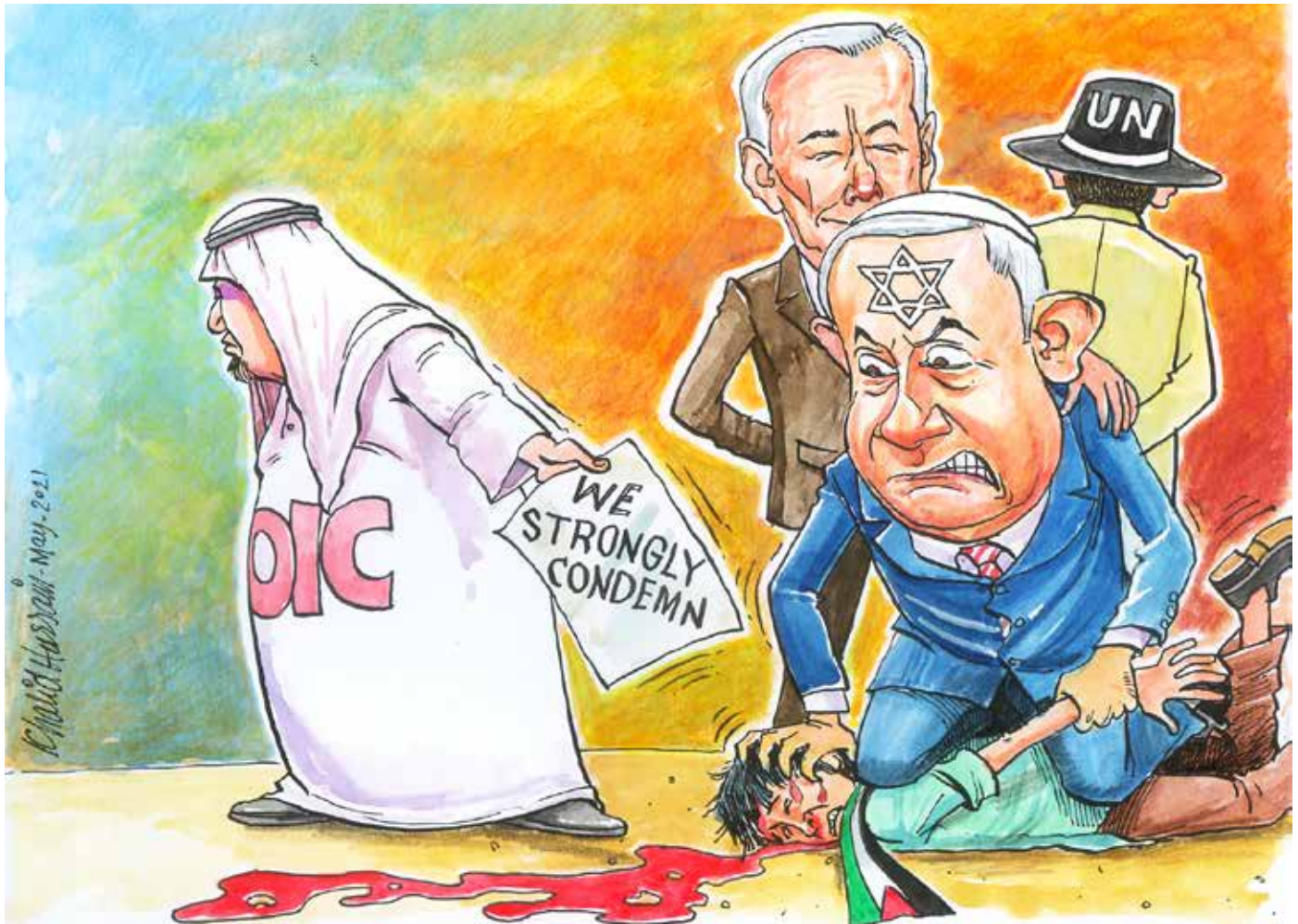
I wonder whether he too intends to set up a group like Jahangir Tareen. One that demands he get a fair shake. That group awaits a signal before making a move. Faisal Vawda says it's an SHO. True, Tareen should only count on support after some supporter has been accused of buffalo theft, yet remained loyal. But still, Vawda must be feeling threatened, after his monopoly over sounding ridiculous sorry, extreme was challenged by Murad Raas, who wondered why the Palestinians were still fighting with stones, and what they did with all the money they got in aid. That means that they couldn't be helped, not unless they proved they weren't corrupt elements.

Footnote to these notes: The two richest men in the world, Jeff Bezos of Amazon and Bill Gates of Microsoft got divorced. My turn will be a long time coming, if they work their way down the list by wealth. I'll leave the worrying to other people.



Palestine Will Be Free

The latest flare-up in Gaza has put paid to the myth that the Zionist apartheid ethnostate has successfully subsumed Palestine.



By Ibrahim Moiz

The bloodshed has abated but the crisis continues. A fortnight's bloody escalation in the long-simmering tension between Israel and the Palestinians ended quite suddenly with a ceasefire that, at the moment, seems to be mostly holding.

Much commentary has noted that Israel's longstanding Prime Minister, Benjamin Netanyahu is under electoral pressure after corruption charges refuse to go away; and that the two major Palestinian factions, Fatah and Hamas, had an intended election in the offing.

But these are tangential if not unimportant issues. Netanyahu's free reign to far-right Israeli settlers hell-bent on ethnically cleansing pockets of East Jerusalem from

their Palestinian inhabitants predates his political woes by a long margin.

Meanwhile the Palestinians have not been in any position to conduct a meaningful election since Hamas won the last round, a good fifteen years ago. For fourteen of those fifteen years, the southern city Gaza, which Hamas dominates, has been placed under a crippling Israeli blockade.

The fact that the actual fighting, such as it were, focused around Gaza distracts from the fact that the conflict this time began in the West Bank, where Hamas is absent. One of the flashpoints was an East Jerusalem neighbourhood whose Palestinian inhabitants the Israeli Supreme Court ordered to vacate their homes.

For their part, the residents insisted that the documentation proving their ownership had been ignored in court. But the debate over the legality of this specific case should not distract from the unmistakable pattern of how far-right Zionist "settlers" – a quaint term for thuggish militiamen – have been permitted to harass, intimidate, and expel Palestinians by hook or crook in the occupied territories.

This is how the Israeli far-right has pursued their dream of forming a homogenous Jewish ethnostate. In the process, the Israeli government has been able to wield a stronger and stronger hand in whatever negotiations occur with the largely toothless Palestinian Authority in the West Bank.

The other notable flashpoint was the Israeli police's storming of the Aqsa Mosque compound. This was belatedly and unconvincingly explained away as an attempt to disarm the worshippers there – whose “armaments” consisted of rocks, collected only in defence against police raids.

It was in response to these provocations that Hamas, which has ruled a battered Gaza, saw an opportunity to reassert its relevance with a barrage of rockets against Israel. Though the majority were intercepted by Israel's air defence system, the wide range that Hamas and other Gaza-based militias targeted came as a surprise. Netanyahu's response was to order a ferocious aerial bombardment of Gaza.

When a ceasefire, brokered by Cairo and Doha, was finally accepted a week later, some 250 people had been killed. While this number included Basim Issa and Husam Abu-Harbid, the Gaza commanders from Hamas and the Palestinian Jihad militia respectively, at least half of the casualties were civilians.

The campaign, and the global outcry against it, put to rest several myths that Tel Aviv and its supporters in the Gulf had bandied for a while. The first was that the Palestinian issue was a generational problem that no longer had any relevance to Muslims and Arabs – that young Arabs in the fashion of Emirati yuppies were now more concerned with material progress.

That assumption had always rested on the cynical propaganda of several Gulf capitals close to Israel – most notably Abu Dhabi, which has found common ground with Israel over their shared opposition to political Islam in recent years.

The 2020 process of normalization between Tel Aviv and several Arab autarkies – a process that was ridiculously named after the Prophet Abraham when the tyrant Herod would have been a more apt historical reference – had rested on this assumption, but it was clear that even if opportunistic Arab autocrats no longer cared to protest over Palestine, the same could not be said of their subjects.

Another myth put to bed was the persistent idea, partly used to justify the above claim, that the Palestinian issue was simply

escalated by Iran. Certainly Tehran has its proxies and allies in the region – among them the Yemeni Houthis, the Lebanese Hezbollah, a number of Iraqi militias, and even the Palestinian Jihad faction.

Yet with the exception of Palestinian Jihad based in Gaza – which could not help but be involved in the fray – the regional flare-up always promised between Israel and Iran was non-existent. Even Hamas' links to Iran, the source of much consternation in the Gulf, are equivocal and came only after Cairo and Riyadh helped isolate the Hamas group.

To be sure, Israel and Iran are rivals, with Tel Aviv particularly nervous about Tehran's nuclear capability. To frame the Palestine issue through the lens of this far subtler and slower-burning rivalry, however, is blatantly misleading.

Thirdly, the Palestinian Authority – dominated by Fatah leader Mahmoud Abbas since 2005 – is clearly moribund. First installed in the mid-1990s, it was an improvisational body to which Fatah – hitherto the leading Palestinian militia – largely agreed because it needed a foothold in the occupied territories, and to which Israel agreed in order to control Palestinian militancy more closely.

But the Palestinian authority has proven a Potemkin village whose painful limitations have rendered it a far more unpopular rival to its much-vilified competitor Hamas. This has in turn discredited Fatah. While the last twenty years have seen numerous attempts at a compromise between Fatah and Hamas, it is no longer clear if the former is in any shape to make a compromise.

A fourth myth, which is rarely believed but still omnipresent in much commentary on the conflict, is that the United States is an equal broker in the conflict. This was never true – even in the 1970s and 1980s when Washington's links to several Arab regimes forced it to slightly rein in its Israeli vassalage – but it is less true than ever now.

What is more, the Arab constituency with which Washington is concerned were never the Palestinians, but rather such capitals as Cairo and Riyadh, which have long since abandoned any pretence of solidarity with Palestinians.

Where does this leave the Palestinian issue? On the international stage, it will likely return to the same position it occupied in the 1990s and 2000s – a diplomatic football for regimes as different as Cairo, Damascus, and Riyadh to use as evidence of their bargaining power.

At the local level, Hamas may have made a political point, but it comes at a heavy price. The West Bank remains in Israel's grip, while Gaza remains under a blockade.

The events of 2021 will join 2008, 2009, 2012, and 2014 as another “battle” in this siege's history – if battle is the correct word, since the Palestinians have lost fortyfold as many people in the conflict as their opponents (four thousand to a hundred) since the blockade began in 2007.

Yet if the military option has been costly, so has non-violent resistance. Hamas' barrage of rockets was the first attack of its sort in seven years, and all those years of hiatus made little difference. Indeed, a non-violent protest movement in 2018-19 was already ruthlessly put down by Tel Aviv.

While Israeli policymakers may be content to have flexed their military muscle by flattening large parts of Gaza from the air, they have suffered humiliation on the public diplomacy front. For the global citizenry, a key takeaway from the latest round of active hostilities was that while the Palestinian-Israeli conflict is not the bloodiest in the world, it is decidedly the most lopsided.

That the overwhelming majority of some 250 fatalities the conflict left in its wake were Palestinians helped press home the inherent injustice of the conflict, notwithstanding the determined and shameless international diplomatic attempts to treat it as a war between equals.

But most importantly, the flare-up dealt a death blow to the illusion that Tel Aviv has managed to contain the Palestinian issue – that the new generation of Palestinians is resigned to living under the occupation of the Zionist apartheid ethnostate.

It is not over yet and it will not be over until Palestine is free, from the river to the sea.

The One-Sided War

Exigencies of electoral politics in both Israel and the Palestinian Authority continue to bleed Palestinians.



By Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri

Would that happen if Bernie Sanders was the President of the United States today!

Before we dwell into the aftermath of the 11-day devastating war between the hapless Palestinians and the all-powerful State of Israel; let's take a look at what the progressive Senator, and two-times Presidential candidate, had to say on the current crisis in the Middle East.

On May 12, hours after the skirmishes between Hamas and Israel went into full swing, Sanders tweeted: "Once again, we are seeing how the irresponsible actions of government-allied right-wing extremists in Jerusalem can escalate quickly into devastating war."

And: "Israeli children should not have to spend the night scared in bomb shelters, as many are doing tonight. Palestinian children should not have to grow up under the constant violence and oppression of occupation, as so many do, and have done."

An unbiased approach! Of course, as a senior-most politician in the United States, he has his stakes as he deals with Zionists, too.

Then on May 19, when death and destruction was at its height, Sanders once again had the courage to stand up on the floor of the Senate and proclaim: "The Senate mourns the loss of innocent life caused by Hamas' rocket attacks... But what about the loss of 227 Palestinian lives, including 64 children and 38 women...Or perhaps some people think that Palestinian lives don't matter. I would hope not.

"And let us be very clear that when we talk about the tragedy that is now taking place in Gaza, what we are talking about is not only the terrible loss of life. As I hope most people know, Gaza before this war was an extremely poor and desperate community. And the latest Israeli bombardment has only made a bad situation, much, much worse."

This was realism at his best. Unlike President Joseph Biden's administration that took refuge behind political exigency, in order to pamper and protect Israel, Sanders called a spade a spade!

His concluding remarks were thrilling and result-oriented: "...My friends day after day, year after year, decade after decade, non-violent Palestinian activists struggle against the daily violence and harassment of occupation. Violence and harassment subsidized, by the way, with billions of US taxpayer dollars."

He was referring to the massive aid of around USD 3 billion per annum to Israel from the American coffers. In a polite way, he reminded that as per the Constitution of the United States, "...it is illegal to aid and support a state that indulges in human rights violations."

Sanders' was just being honest and quite American in essence; and that is how



America of George Washington and Thomas Jefferson should have been!

Now let's see what went wrong suddenly and why.

This is not the first war between the unequal foes to take place in the last many decades, since the Palestinian resistance movement turned into a full-fledged armed struggle in the occupied lands. This May 2021 outbreak of hostilities has its genesis in political upheavals in both Israel and the occupied territories' quasi-controlled by Hamas and Fatah.

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu who believes in 'racist nationalism' felt that he is now at the twilight of his career. He badly needed a jingoistic narrative to stay put in power. Two years of ceaseless electioneering and a host of scams in Israel had weakened Netanyahu's position.

Likewise, the divisive Palestinian Authority under Fatah leadership, and the Hamas holed-up in ghettoized Gaza were unable to deliver. The Palestinian struggle for statehood was languishing with no clue, no direction, and no way out!

Hamas ultimately found an opportunity and went into a proactive gear as Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas unilaterally decided to put off the first planned Palestinian elections after more than 15 years.

Across the Iron Dome divide, Netanyahu too was perfecting his own nefarious designs. The coals were being stoked for Hamas by provoking it into formal warfare.

The plot thickened as Jewish extremists resorted to excesses against the Palestinians in Jerusalem throughout the holy month of Ramadan. They set up barricades at the Damascus Gate entrance to the Old City, where Palestinians traditionally came for evening prayers and to break the fast. This

led to clashes in East Jerusalem. This was followed by evicting Palestinians from their homes in Sheikh Jarrah to make room for Jewish settlers.

The last straw came as Israeli police threw grenades into Al-Aqsa Mosque. The outrage among the Palestinians was obvious. This provided Hamas with an opportunity to step in as the ultimate defender of Palestinian rights. Fatah leadership had never been quick to reciprocate and take a stand.

Netanyahu's trap worked. But to the surprise of Tel Aviv, Hamas reportedly fired more than 4500 rockets into Israel from its bastion in Gaza; and ultimately drew fire. The response from the Zionist state was tragic, to say the least: 11 days of aerial bombardment, 260 deaths, and destruction of property worth billions of dollars.

Gaza is home to about two million Palestinians, and rightly termed as the largest open-air jail in the world. It is landlocked and blockaded by sea and air. The United Nations says the life of more than 70 per cent of its populace depends on succor from outside. Now it is in ruins.

This war was the fourth since Hamas took control of Gaza in 2007.

Irrespective of the fact that the only armed threat to Israel comes in the form of rocket attacks from Hamas, Israel has learnt to live with it. Tel Aviv is content with the divisions in the rank and file of Palestinians. This is why Israel refuses to negotiate with the Palestinian Authority for realising a two-state solution despite overwhelming international pressure, including the soft-peddalling of the United States. Divisions among the Palestinian factions in Gaza and the West Bank come as a bonanza for Israel.

Thus, the new episode of warfare has pushed back the Palestinian cause of statehood in a renewed limbo. Israel for obvious reasons of geopolitics isn't interested in a deal on trading the land for peace. And as far as the Palestinians are concerned, they have always lacked the muscle to triumph in terms of diplomacy.

The so-called Muslim might and voices of emotionalism end up in thin air, sooner than later!

The 30-plus Muslim States Multinational Islamic Force stationed in Saudi Arabia is perhaps not meant for Palestinians' defence!

So is the case with the so-called Al-Quds force of millions being groomed up in Iran! Tall claims, hollow promises and chest-thumping bravados are modus operandi of the Muslim world!!

Muslim states and their respective leadership is an ardent believer in tabling resolutions, attending summit meeting, and dispersing happily after a celebrated and televised photo-op! It is no less than a cruel joke as far as the Palestinians' rights are concerned.

Then why lament over the West's so-called prejudice and favouritism towards the Jewish state? The Muslim world too has its own failings.

Though the ceasefire holds, this is not going to be the last skirmish, anyway. Hamas and Israel will soon be in another faceoff at the expense of Palestinian lives.

Notwithstanding the obliging path that many of the Muslim states have adopted by recognizing Israel – from Egypt to Turkey and from UAE to Sudan and Bahrain, Tel Aviv will not be showcasing any gesture of kindness when it comes to building Jewish settlements and devastating the Palestinians. That is the Zionist mind-set.

So what is the way out?

How long will this game of death and destruction be played? It has to be borne in mind that volatility in the Middle East has ramifications for the world at large, and this Palestinian-Israeli brawl has a jaundiced religious connotation. It can blow up the entire world in war flames.

It is futile to believe that in an era of geo-economics alliances and vested realignments, Palestine will figure anywhere for a solution. The only possibility is if the Western powers and the United States decide on their largesse to broker a solution, as they did when they decided to do away with colonialism by crafting unreal geographic states from the Middle East to Africa and Asia.

But the good point is that in this age of social media, it is the Western audience that is getting pro-Palestine, and has mustered the courage and decency to distance itself from barbarism and illegitimate occupation. This is no small achievement.

This mostly non-Muslim constituency should be saluted for standing up for a cause that has no political or emotional linkages with them; but are purely humane in essence. The biggest such change is ensuing in the United States itself.

In a survey carried out in American media recently, by eliciting response from Middle Eastern scholars and academicians, it was evident that pro-Palestinian statehood

constituency has swollen from 15 per cent to a staggering 31 per cent. Public opinion firmly behind Israel is 19 per cent; whereas more than 24 per cent of populace is indecisive but sympathises with humanitarian considerations of the Palestinian people. This transformed into a political chorus will mean a bonanza for Palestinians.

People like Sanders, Noam Chomsky, Daniel Kurtzer, a former US ambassador to Israel, and last but not least, Republican Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez insists that the two-state solution remains the only policy goal worth striving for — preferable to a single bi-national state, or an Israeli-Palestinian confederation where Jerusalem is shared. Their voices cannot be brushed aside, as they mean congeniality and a long-term solution for both the feuding factions.

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres described the hostilities as “utterly appalling,” and warned that hopes of “coexistence and peace between Palestinians and Israelis are being pushed even farther to the horizon.”

He was more forthcoming than many of the Muslim states representatives at the Security Council, when he described Gaza as an “integral part of the future Palestinian State,” saying no effort should be spared to bring about “real national reconciliation that ends the division.”

Big and meaningful words from a high officeholder at the world body – in an era when many of the neighbouring states,

including Egypt and Jordan, are craving for a booty in Gaza.

The Muslim world has failed miserably to live up to the expectations of Gazans. If Egypt throws open its borders with Gaza, it will take air out of the Israeli balloon. But Cairo will not do it for its own interests. So is the case with Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain, Kuwait and Turkey.

Will their ultimatum to react militarily and arm Palestinians openly change the entire paradigm? Again, that is not going to happen and such a probability is not on the cards. Until then, Palestinians are on their own.

So what could be a last-ing solution?

The Holy city of Jerusalem is, in fact, the real bone of contention in terms of a geopolitical solution in terms of defining its suzerainty. Historians, academicians and theologians endorse a roadmap that should rewind the region back to the original partition plan of 1947.

According to the UN General Assembly’s decision, a Jewish state and an Arab state were to be established with Jerusalem as an international city. Jordan’s King Hussein had called it ‘God’s City’ because it caters to Judaism, Christianity and Islam. Give it a try. Rest of the territorial configurations in realpolitik will fall in line.

Ishtiaq Ali Mehkri is a senior journalist and research fellow.



OIC: Oh, I See!

Muslims in general and the OIC in particular have been all words and no action over the sorry plight of Palestinians. Will this ever change?



By Mishaal Ashraf

Two rival communities' desire to own the same piece of land has caused one of the greatest conflicts in history. Both the indigenous Palestinian Arabs and Jewish settlers of Israel have been caught in a long-fought war to get the ownership of land that they both hold dear. However, a compromise has been difficult to achieve.

As the WWI came to an end, Britain gained control of Palestine as its custodian, when the Ottoman Empire was defeated. The land was populated by Arab majority and Jewish minority. The responsibility to find peace between the two communities living in the same territory was given to Britain.

Tensions rose between them as the land held religious importance for both the Muslims and Jews. As the conflict over the ownership of land grew, the United Nations (UN) in 1947 passed a resolution to split Palestine into two parts: one for Muslims, one for Jews, and Jerusalem to be an international city.

However, this resolution was not accepted by the Palestinians, and hence was never implemented. The status of Jerusalem as an international city became one of the major causes towards the unacceptance of the UN Resolution.

Jerusalem holds spiritual significance for Muslims, Christians, and Jews. As per international law, Jerusalem belongs to none but belongs to all. It neither belongs to Palestine nor to Israel. It will remain an international city until the two-state solution is implemented. When that happens, East Jerusalem will belong to Palestine and West Jerusalem to Israel.

Israel and Palestine have been fighting on and off over one issue or another. Sometimes it is over the ownership of Jerusalem, and other times on the Gaza strip.

When the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) was formed in 1969, a glimmer of hope for the Muslim countries was seen.

OIC is the second largest international organization of the world, and is responsible for more than 24% of the global population. It was seen as a caretaker body, which would participate actively in issues confronted by Muslim states, support them, and find reasonable solutions for them. Unfortunately, though, it has been as ineffective as the UN.

Many wars have been fought between Palestinians and Israelis. Every single time, heated speeches have been made by various countries but no practical steps have been taken. The Arab world, which would take part in these conflicts in the past, now seem unbothered. They have established diplomatic ties with the Jewish state of Israel instead.

In Israel's War of Independence in 1948 and during the Six-Day War in 1967, countries like Syria, Egypt, Jordan would come forward to support Palestine. But that does not seem like the case at the moment.

It appears that the Arab world has gone deaf to the cries of Palestinians, being bombarded on a daily basis.

With time, Israel was able to step into the world of technology and innovation. While Muslims remained busy in sectarian strife, Jews excelled in education, modern technology, mathematics, physics and what not. Gradually, they made themselves capable enough to turn their foes to friends.

Today, investments in the right sectors gives Israelis leverage over Muslim states. Jordan and Egypt who would fight up front against Israelis during the 20th century have now formed friendly relations with Israel. Libya, Syria, and Iraq have gotten so weak over time that they are struggling to survive to as independent states. All these countries have either faced or are facing civil war like situations. They are not in a position stand up to Israel in support of their Palestinian brothers.

Recently, in May 2021, the Israeli police raided al-Aqsa Mosque, after weeks of tension between the two communities. Thousands of rockets and hundreds of airstrikes have been launched in Gaza, on the Palestinian territory, killing more than 200 Palestinians. Large parts of the Gaza strip have been reduced to rubble.

Once again, the 57-member organization called an emergency session on the 7th day of Gaza attacks against the barbarism by Israelis. THE KSA condemned the attacks and called for a ceasefire along with Bahrain and UAE. Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia called for an emergency UN General Assembly session to discuss the violation of countless international laws in Gaza by Israel.

Turkish foreign ministry called for an international protection mechanism for Palestinian civilians and demanded that Israel be held accountable in the Interna-

tional Criminal Court. Similarly, Pakistan urged the international community on various international platforms to take appropriate measures and bring an end to the Israeli massacre.

Albeit the statements issued by the Muslim world sound promising, they are of no use unless these words are translated to action. Palestinians have suffered enough even for their next generations, and it is high time the world leaders took serious measures against the injustice being done to them.

The question this begs is, to what end have the Muslim countries raised their armies? Are they meant to be used in their inter-cine battles alone or can we expect them to help the Muslim World stand up against Israel and India's tyranny in Palestine in Kashmir? Will the OIC step up its game and take some practical measures to help end the brutalization of Palestinians or will it go down the history as "Oh, I See"?

Pakistan Stands with Palestine Forever

Why the support for Palestinian cause has not dwindled in the Pakistani society over the years.

By Zainab Umer

The Palestine-Israel conflict dates back to the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948 after the intercommunal violence in Mandatory Palestine between Israelis and Arabs that had simmered from 1920 erupted into full-scale hostilities in 1947.

The world has seen Pakistan standing with Palestine, refusing to recognize Israel as a legitimate state despite the fact that several Muslim countries like Bahrain and UAE have already done so. This begs the questions as to why Pakistan refuses to stand with Israel despite the very obvious political advantages. Pakistan's being stands upon some very radical pillars when it comes to foreign policy and foreign relations.

Perhaps a reason behind this refusal of recognizing Israel is that a very fundamental part of Pakistan's foreign policy entails the concept of having very strong ties with fellow Islamic states and standing with Israel would strike a very harsh blow to that pillar. Another major reason as to why the support for Palestinian cause is so overwhelming in Pakistan is possibly



because every dominant political trend ever seen by Pakistan has been Pro-Palestine. All parties including the leftist and the rightist parties remain quite adamant when it comes to support for Palestine.

A flare-up of the Palestine-Israel conflict in May 2021 was marked by protests and rioting, police riot control, rocket attacks on Israel by Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad, and Israeli airstrikes targeting the



Gaza Strip. As a result of Israeli bombardment on 17 May, 94 buildings were demolished in Gaza, comprising 461 housing and commercial units. As a result of the violence, at least 232 Palestinians were killed, including 65 children, in Gaza by Israeli airstrikes.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has ordered officials to make preparations for holding state-level protests against the Israeli atrocities in Palestine. Pakistanis took their feelings of anguish about the Palestinian issue to the streets, banners in hand and slogans at the tip of their tongues.

Pakistan marked Friday, 21 May as Palestine Day across the country to show their unflinching support for the victims of the Gaza massacre through protest demonstrations and rallies planned across several parts of the country. Teens took to the streets angered by the killings in Palestine. They raised their banners with "From the river to the sea, Palestine will be free" and "Free Gaza, stop genocide" written in bold, red, angry letters.

The idea of the protest started from Instagram posts and then onto a nationwide protest. As the hours went by the number of protestors increased and areas like Zainab Market, Saddam and Shaheen Complex saw holdups for hours.

Shamshad Qureshi, a member of the Central Executive Committee of the Pak Sarzamin Party, called out Muslim countries for their silence which boosted Israel's morale so much that it has now targeted media houses. "We stand with journalists from all over the world including Pakistan and will continue to highlight their voices."

Many international celebrities took to Instagram and spoke for the Palestinian cause. American-Palestinian model Bella Hadid has been at the forefront of the matter as she took part in a pro-Palestine protest in New York where she shouted slogans, wore the Keffiyeh (a headdress worn by Arab men, consisting of a square of fabric fastened by a band round the crown of the head) and proudly carried the Palestinian flag.

Bella allegedly might have lost a contract with Dior after her rather vocal stance against the atrocities being committed by the Israeli forces. Numerous Pakistani teens shared Bella Hadid's tweets in solidarity with Palestine and praised her for speaking up for the oppressed Palestinians despite working for many Israel-owned brands.

According to The New York Times, "A raid by the Israeli police on the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem left hundreds of Palestinians and a score of police officers wounded, militants in Gaza responded by firing a barrage of rockets at Jerusalem, drawing Israeli airstrikes in return."

This attack on the mosque Al-Aqsa drew a rather loud reaction in the Pakistani society. Along with this attack being a great humanitarian issue, it was also an attack to the religious sentiments of the Pakistanis. The mosque Al-Aqsa being of great significance to Muslims, a very strong belief being that the Prophet Muhammad (SAW) was transported from the Sacred Mosque in Mecca to Al-Aqsa during the Night Journey, and then on to the heaven. It is also believed that the Prophet Muhammad led prayers towards this site until Allah directed him to turn towards the Kaaba.

Not long after the news of the attack

arrived, Pakistanis flooded the internet sharing stories and posts on twitter, Instagram and Facebook. Within a few hours of the attack #savepalestine was trending on Twitter.

"I am convinced the tide is turning", Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi said in an interview with CNN. "I am convinced the public pressure, the pressure of public opinion mounting and the ceasefire is inevitable. Israel is losing out. They are losing the media war."

His remarks to CNN came ahead of a truce announcement by Israel. Qureshi stressed that Pakistan would not condone such "insanity" and acts of aggression against innocent people. In a public appearance he urged the UN General Assembly "to play its role to evolve a consensus that leads to a ceasefire, de-escalation, and an end to atrocities in Palestine."

The Israeli police stormed the Al Aqsa mosque compound once again on Friday, a few hours after a truce was reached between Israel and Hamas, putting a damper on a few hours of peace for the Palestinians as they came out on the streets to celebrate. Al Jazeera journalist Arwa Ibrahim also reported stun grenades being launched at worshippers, "Back to square one?" she asked.

Pakistanis having to witness Indian oppressed Kashmir and now Palestine are not willing to sit back and forget the tragedies and the massacres that have taken place even after the ceasefire declared by Israel. With social media in the hands of Pakistanis who do not stand for any sort of human rights violations, it is rather difficult to ignore such a strong movement that stands in solidarity with Palestine and every other oppressed people.



Lockdown Easing After Averting Super-Spreader Eid

The caseload may be easing but the hospitals are still close to the breaking point and the pandemic is far from over.

By Noor Aftab

The authorities are moving to gradually lift travel and other restrictions after a strict lockdown bracketing the Eid holiday apparently helped Pakistan ward off the prospect of the Muslim festival of thanksgiving becoming a super-spreader event.

Average number of new infections reported each day in Pakistan fell by more than 2,700 over the last 3 weeks, 47 percent of its previous peak. Many indicators are showing downward trend in Covid-19 cases but still the healthcare workers feel exhausted and hospitals are teetering on the edge of being overwhelmed as many patients need medical care.

Moreover, the COVID-19 has become more than a health crisis for Pakistan with critical social, economic and political consequences. The daily average death rate is about 125 per day and daily confirmed cases have been above 4,500 for the last few days.

The positivity ratio in major cities is still high with Lahore 23.5percent, Karachi 18 percent, Bahawalpur 14.4 percent, Peshawar 14.1 percent, Faisalabad 11 percent, Hyderabad 8.6 percent, Islamabad 8.1 percent, Swat 6.3 percent, and Charsadda 6.2percent.

The number of cases is not showing reduction in fifty-two districts where smart lockdowns are being implemented to flatten the curve of the pandemic. There are 191 testing facilities where nearly 35,000 tests are being conducted daily, showing low ratio given the vast population of Pakistan.

The fight goes on

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases recorded so far in Pakistan is 893,461. Out of them 20,089 (2.2 percent) patients lost their lives while 810,143 (90.7 percent) succeeded to defeat this disease. The number of



active cases is 63,229 and 4,500 patients are on oxygen. The national positivity ratio has reduced to nearly 7 percent but it is still high. A total of 12,552,339 coronavirus tests have been conducted so far in the country.

The number of confirmed COVID-19 patients in Islamabad is 80,010; active cases 7,887; deaths 741; and recovered patients 71,382.

In Punjab, the number of confirmed cases is 332,000; active cases 25,117; deaths 9,704; recovered patients 297,179. The number of confirmed cases in Sindh is 304,571; active cases 20,514; deaths 4,869; and recovered patients 279,188.

In Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP), the number of confirmed coronavirus cases is 128,561; active cases 6,913; deaths 3,875; and recovered patients 117,773. The number of confirmed cases in Balochistan is 24,318; active cases 1,023; deaths 270; and recovered patients 23,025.

In Azad Jammu and Kashmir, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases is 18,547, active cases 1,719, deaths 523 and recovered patients 16,314. The number of confirmed cases in Gilgit-Baltistan is 5,454; active cases 65; deaths 107; and recovered patients 5,282.

Smart vs complete lockdown

The complete 10-day countrywide lockdown from May 8 to 18 helped prevent spread of coronavirus to some extent but the statistics shared so far by the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) showed no dramatic results. Many health experts declared complete lockdown successful because in their opinion it greatly mitigated the chances of rise in infection rate that was climbing fast a couple of weeks back.

Despite positive outcome of complete lockdown the government will continue to pursue policy of smart lockdowns and mini-smart lockdowns because it thinks that continuity in complete lockdown may further fuel unemployment, threaten food insecurity, and contribute to an overall economic meltdown.

The relevant data proves that the concerns of the government about complete lockdown carry weight. The Pakistani national economy is mainly dependent on small to medium manufacturing and service industries. Its ranking on Human Development Index (HDI) is 152 out of 189 countries, reflecting higher health inequality as compared to the average of South Asian countries.

Pakistan also ranks 105 out of 195 countries on the Global Health Security Index, raising question about its ability to deal with the coronavirus pandemic. So the policy of smart lockdowns and mini-smart lockdowns can prove successful at least in terms of reducing infection rate among the general public.

Gradual lifting of Lock-down

The NCOC has announced opening of educational institutions in districts with less than five percent positivity ratio, outdoor dining by restaurants and tourism sector under stringent Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) from 24 May. It also stated that all educational institutions across the country would be allowed to start classes by 7 June.

Outdoor marriage ceremonies with a maximum of 150 guests would be allowed from 1 June while closure of shrines, cinemas, indoor dining, indoor gyms, amusement parks and ban on contact sports, festivals, all types of indoor and outdoor cultural, musical, religious and other events would continue. There would also be a ban on inter-provincial public transport on Saturdays and Sundays from 22 May.

Vaccine enthusiasm and hesitancy

While various coronavirus variants are playing havoc in Pakistan, the vaccination is now the only solution to build a line of defence to combat the third wave of the pandemic. Pakistan averaged about 112,246 doses administered each day, which means at this rate, it will take a further 386 days to administer enough doses for another 10 percent of the population. Around four million people (less than 2 percent) have so far been administered vaccines across the country. The number of 'Partially Vaccinated' people is 2,631,873; and 'Fully vaccinated' 1,193,441 while a total of 4,956,853 vaccine doses have so far been administered in Pakistan.

The issue of vaccine hesitancy is also adding fuel to fire because Pakistan is currently somewhat successful in managing

the coronavirus pandemic with relatively low rates of severe disease and death but growing concerns of people about foreign vaccines can put the fragile gains against COVID-19 at risk.

According to the experts, there are roughly 100 million adults who are eligible to receive the vaccine. But the government is using only digital communication method to register and schedule the people for the vaccine, which raises the question whether it can reach an elderly population, especially in far flung areas of the country, that may not be technologically literate or may lack access to a phone altogether.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan has said that a total of 3.8 million people have so far got vaccine in the country. In all, 4,329 showed side-effects and ninety percent of them suffered from fever. Only six people (under 50 years of age) showed severe health issues.

As far as the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine is concerned, on average four in one million people who get this vaccine face issue of blood clotting and one of them dies. But he maintained that the global health regulatory authorities have declared Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine safe and effective. He also informed that this vaccine would not be administered to the people below the age of 40 years.

New tourism guidelines

The government has stated that hotels and guesthouses should seek negative PCR /COVID-19 report along with CNICs from the tourists before giving them rooms to stay. Those guests who have been vaccinated should be requested to deposit a copy of authentic vaccination certificate.

Hotels and guesthouses would not book rooms for people above 40 years of age without vaccination certificates after 1 June 2021. At all entry points to travel areas the local administration will arrange check posts manned by Law Enforcement Agencies (LEA) where all travellers can register and fill up a Health Declaration Form (HDF).

Travel restrictions

The travellers who come to Pakistan from other countries must provide traveller

contact information through the PassTrack mobile app or an accessible web-based form, undergo screening by a health official, and provide a certificate of negative COVID-19 RT-PCR test. Countries in Category A are exempted from mandatory COVID-19 testing. Travellers from countries in Category B must produce a mandatory negative COVID-19 RT-PCR test that has to be taken within 72 hours of the travel date, and the countries in Category C are restricted and are only allowed as per guidelines by NCOC.

Limitations and gaps

Research shows low literacy rate and general lack of awareness among the people especially living in remote areas is leading to non-seriousness of general public towards the adoption of social distancing and hand hygiene. The high population density in major cities facilitate in the spread of virus. The three-pronged approach of trace, test, and treat needs to be aggressively implemented to halt the community transmission leading to exponential increase in cases.

Pakistan, being a resource-limited country with a lack of proper emergency preparedness mechanisms in place, needs to reinforce national public health capabilities, infrastructure, aggressive disease surveillance systems, laboratory networks, and trained human resources. With the available resources, the country has sufficiently raised levels of preparedness. However, there is a lot of room to develop robust strategies for effective surveillance mechanisms supported by aggressive institutional support with a strong diagnostic capacity and case management system.

Far from over

It is rightly said that since a virus can be defeated somewhere only when it is defeated everywhere, it will be absurd to pretend that we can achieve security in isolation, within a particular country, nation, culture, or class. The pandemic is far from over as it will not be over anywhere until it is over everywhere. The availability of effective drugs is only one element needed to combat the disease. The process of restoring pre-pandemic life will be very lengthy.

The same page smudged?



By Hammad Ghaznavi

The Jahangir Tareen group has been harnessed; their demands have been met; the development funds for their respective constituencies have been committed; the stick and carrot policy has yielded fruit, the group is done and dusted, all is well. Those who agree with the above statement are politically, to put it mildly, naïve.

The JT group has not emerged out of the woodwork. It has a long history that goes back to pre-2018 elections. Almost all of the group members came into the PTI fold just before the polls, courtesy Jahangir Tareen. (Remember Tareen's infamous plane?) When JT fell out of favour there was no one in the PTI to protect the interests of these legislators, MNAs and MPAs. "Imran doesn't even know our names. The party has no structure and we have been denied access to the PM, who controls Punjab hands on," cribs an MNA of the group.

The two FIA cases against JT provided a god-sent opportunity to the disgruntled legislators, primarily from the southern Punjab, to rally behind the man who fetched PTI election tickets for them, who has been always there for them. In brief, these members have been in touch all along, they have been cribbing about the treatment meted out to them; finally, they have decided to go public against the incumbent regime. Step by step, the group moved on. It will be simplistic to diagnose it all as a knee-jerk reaction of the FIA cases against JT.

The JT group is a political reality that is expected to stay intact, not only for their own good but for the 'larger national interest'. It will also be politically innocent to believe that the powers-that-be are indifferent to the formation and politics of the JT group. The group, many political analysts agree, will not cross the 'red line' without the nod from the right quarters. The first such 'red line' approaching is the Annual Budget next month. A look at the numbers in the legislatures, both National Assembly and Punjab Assembly, reveals that the superior vena cava of these houses is in the clutches of the JT group. No doubt about that. Particularly in Punjab it is as simple as two plus two four. As for PM Imran Khan, it is tough to handle the JT issue, a real catch 22 situation. If JT is hurt in the cases or the Ali Zafar report, life will be difficult for the PM, and if JT comes out of the sugar scandal unscathed, there will be cries of NRO!

The PTI government has already been under immense pressure from the coalition partners for a greater share in the cabinet, funds and various appointments. Besides, PML, MQM, BAP and GDA, now the government has to deal with the newest of them all, the JT group, which is the biggest of all the coalition groups.

Shehbaz Sharif's release from the jail and his grabbing of the political limelight, many argue, is a related

political development. Shehbaz is known for his political flexibility. Vote ko izzat do is not a slogan that he raises with vigour. In his entire political career, he has never sounded bitter about the khaki. He has always been a willing junior partner in a hybrid political system, a rarity in the Sharif family. His release is being indicated as a development that says a lot about the upcoming political scenario. His contacts with the PPP and ANP leaderships augur well for the future of PDM. The PM Khan seems watching all this keenly. Shehbaz, despite an unambiguous High Court order was not allowed to leave the country.

There are a few 'authentic rumours' regarding the importance of Shehbaz Sharif's planned visit to the UK. One, he has been in negotiations with Rawalpindi, discussing the Establishment-PML-N rapprochement in detail. Two, now he has to get the final nod from the 'absconder-in-chief', three time prime minister, big brother Mian Muhammad Nawaz Sharif. Reportedly, stopping Shehbaz has not been appreciated by Rawalpindi.

These developments are unsavoury for the great Khan. During the last few weeks, he has been consistently talking about the end game – "even if my government is sent packing, I will not budge." Has the infamous 'same page' been smudged? Keep watching!



Is PMLN Mending Fences with Establishment?

The PTI leadership is said to be losing sleep over the prospect because given the zero-sum nature of the game, one party's gain will be the other's loss.

By Zain Rihat

The recent conciliatory statements by the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leaders suggest that its narrative of confrontation taking a backseat though party says it was never at war with the establishment.

Maryam Nawaz, who draws power from her father's endorsement of her anti-establishment narrative, had been bashing the establishment until recently. She was the only Sharif who was in the country to address the media and public until the release of Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz from jail a few weeks back.

As she addressed public rallies, she spared no opportunity to criticize the state institutions she believed were supporting Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI). However, she is no more aggressive against the establishment for allegedly supporting the PTI government.

Some recent developments – such as the release of Shahbaz Sharif and Hamza Shahbaz from jail and the emergence of media reports on the Rawalpindi Ring Road and other scams suggest that troubles are mounting for the ruling PTI while the fortunes of the Sharifs are looking up once more. An inquiry against Capt (R) Safdar has also been dropped.

Recent statements by former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Muhammad Zubair, the spokesman for Nawaz Sharif and Maryam Nawaz, are widely seen as indicating a change in the party's policy of aggression towards the establishment that had been in place until recently.

“The question of reconciliation with the establishment does not arise because we were not at war with them,” he said on a TV talk show a few days back. “We only named the people who were responsible for rigging the election. We never pointed fingers at any institution.”



Abbasi's remarks came in the wake of Mohammad Zubair's admission on a talk show that the PML-N has made peace with Rawalpindi. “PML-N has reached a truce with the establishment”.

These statements clearly indicate the PML-N's anti-establishment narrative has run its course. However, party sources deny any fresh understanding between the PML-N and the establishment.

A party member who spoke to The Truth International (TTI) on condition of anonymity said the party was following the instructions of Mian Nawaz Sharif and whenever there was any injustice, the party would raise its voice against it. However, he dispelled the impression that the PML-N was getting closer to the establishment in the changing political scenario.

On the question whether the narrative of confrontation was taking a backseat, party member Maiza Hameed said that Maryam Nawaz was still advocating for the “vote ko izzat do” narrative and that she will continue with the party narrative. She, however, said that Mian Shahbaz Sharif is senior to Maryam and he has always tried to take the opposition along.

Hameed believes her party won many by-elections in the country recently thanks to the slogan of “vote ko izzat do”. She said that Shahbaz Sharif always wanted to extend a hand of cooperation towards the other parties on the issue of electoral reforms and other issues of national importance.

The PML-N stalwart further said that unfair treatment leads to confrontation as she alleged that NAB has given an NRO to Jehangir Khan Tareen. She said NAB was not an independent institution and added, “We had no confrontation with other institutions.” It seems that following the direct onslaught against top establishment players by the top PML-N leadership, there is now an apparent retreat by the party to help things cool down.

On the other hand, it is not as comfortable a situation as it was earlier for the PTI. Performance of the PTI government has been a point of worry for many including its supporters and the establishment. The PTI is getting unpopular because of multiple issues of governance and the most importantly the state of the economy.

The ruling party lost almost every by-election



tion in recent months. The PTI is really under pressure on the issues of governance and inflation and at the same time emergence of Jehangir Khan Tareen's group and its open confrontation with the parent faction is also a sign of worry for the party.

Background interactions with PML-N members suggests the party and its PDM allies have been harbouring hopes the PTI's internal differences will help them achieve what their hearts' desire: The ouster of the PTI government.



PML-N in particular, is closely observing the developments as estranged Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf leader Jahangir Khan Tareen launched a group of like-minded lawmakers in the lower house of the parliament as well as the Punjab Assembly. The group consisted of his supporters, mainly from South Punjab.

As the cracks within the PTI widen, the Nawaz-led party has adopted an eerie silence. They are neither attacking the PTI nor the establishment, and letting the splinter group do the job – who are criticizing the PTI government for the political victimization in the name of accountability.

There has been a controversy between PTI and Jehangir Khan Tareen over the latter's alleged role in the sugar crisis, which led to the creation of a like-minded group. The PML-N leaders have been seen endorsing the point of view of the PTI's dissidents on different issues.

Some party members equated the implication of Tareen in criminal cases by the FIA with the cases lodged against the PML-N leadership and voiced their sympathies for the PTI's estranged leader. This is how PML-N is trying to achieve its anti-PTI objectives, believe the political experts.

As far as Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman is concerned, he is willing to show flexibility to save the Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) from disintegration. He is willing to even

recognize Gillani as the Opposition Leader in the Senate despite opposition from other ally parties, according to the sources.

Former Prime Minister and PPP leader Raja Pervez Ashraf had a meeting with Maulana Fazlur Rehman at the latter's residence in Islamabad. Both the PPP top leadership and the PDM chief are in contact with each other and want a reunion at the PDM platform. However, according to the sources, PML-N has reservations over it.

The Nawaz-led party has quite convincing reasons for it. It believes that PPP used the PDM platform for its petty political gains and always betrayed the PDM leadership. It rules out any electoral alliance with the PPP in the next general elections and is quite convinced that the PPP is playing on behalf of the establishment.

As PTI feels things are not moving in its favour on the country's political chessboard, be it the release of the Sharif family members or other political developments alluded to above, it is getting stricter against the opposition with a more vocal posture of accountability and no-NRO.

The PTI government blocked the way of Shahbaz Sharif at the Lahore airport when he was about to leave the country for the United Kingdom via Qatar mid-May. He was not allowed to fly from the Lahore airport after the FIA allegedly placed his name on "another list", preventing him from leaving the country.

What the PTI government wants to achieve through this is the question that merits answering here. Apparently, the government believes that Shahbaz's absence from the country at this time may dent its accountability narrative. Secondly, by barring the PML-N leader from going abroad, the government has succeeded to some extent to give the impression that it was not ready to be part of any possible deal between the PML-N and the establishment.

Thirdly, by blocking the way of Shahbaz Sharif, the PTI has succeeded in exposing the alleged 'Shahbaz-establishment relationship'. All this will help the government build its image among the masses and lead to its public acceptance. The government believes that allowing Shahbaz Sharif to go abroad for 'medical treatment' would give the impression that Shahbaz Sharif and establishment has struck a deal and that PTI has no objection to it as was propagated in the case of Nawaz Sharif.

It is yet to be seen if Shahbaz will be allowed to go abroad. However, the government would try its best to block Shahbaz' way, first, to dispel the impression that there was any deal between the establishment and the PML-N. And if he succeeds in going abroad, the government would propagate that Shahbaz left the country after having a deal with the establishment and would try to avail the point scoring opportunity.

Is the Ring Road Scandal A Case of Wolf Crying Wolf?

What if the sensational report is a brazen attempt at politically motivated mudslinging?



By Azeem Waqas

There are indications that the report of a high-level inquiry into the Rawalpindi Ring Road that levelled damning allegations of wrongdoing against a bevy of government officials and realty magnates could be a brazen instance of politically motivated mudslinging.

Two members of the fact finding committee have rejected the allegations levelled by the convener of the committee Syed Gulzar Hussain Shah, the incumbent Deputy Commissioner of Rawalpindi.

“Rawalpindi Ring Road Inquiry report is political”, a senior officer told The Truth International. “It shows clearly that the civil servants have become political. They have strong linkages with political parties and they are acting at their behest”.

The officer said, “PTI ministers believes that Sharif family has strong influence in the civil bureaucracy and senior officers are trying to create hurdles for the government- PM Imran Khan himself states many times publically that Sharif family had invested on bureaucrats.”

Rawalpindi Ring Road Inquiry report adopted by the government has been written by the Deputy Commissioner Rawalpindi Syed Gulzar Hussain Shah who is being nominated for the civil award by the PTI government.

Syed Gulzar Hussain Shah in his inquiry report has tried to establish that Rawalpindi Ring Road alignment has been changed to benefit Syed Tauqir Hussain Shah – a grade 21 officer of PAS and former Personal Secretary to Mian Shahbaz Sharif.

Inquiry report states that Dr Syed Tauqir Shah influenced Paswal zigzag of the illegal alignment and its design features favourable to his personal or family interest in the illegal alignment for boosting value of the property owned by his family.

DC Rawalpindi Syed Gulzar Hussain Shah wrote in his report that Syed Tauqir Shah’s role needs to be probed for controlled access freeways, existing alignments are not used since existing rights, crossings, easements etc. are litigated upon by landowners. The foregoing as well as giving local

accesses from R3 after MI crossing speaks of the existence of conflict of interests as well as use of association.

The report states: “Residual clout on Mr Muhammad Mahmood Ex-Commissioner or through creation of his benami interests, and also by alleged influence used on NESPAK, Dr Tauqir Shah’s rent-seeking intent and conflict of interest is too obvious to ignore. All influential close relative currently holding public office are also reportedly associated in augmenting the influence of Dr Tauqir Shah on Ex-Commissioner, as well as on NESPAK”.

Gulzar Hussain Shah pointed out that Ex Commissioner Rawalpindi Division Muhammad Mehmood needs to be investigated with particular reference to shifting and change of design at Moorat, local accesses at Moorat, before R3-CPEC Motorway merger, local access after crossing M1 towards Paswal Zigzag, and design changes in the Zigzag itself.

“The addition of Attock loop, which was never part of the proposal by NESPAK in 2017, is prima facie indicative of possible rent seeking by both government functionaries at the helm of affairs in Rawalpindi as well as real estate players operating in the area,” says Shah in the report.

According to this report, Attock loop emerges as a divergence from Chakri road onward towards Moorat from the general curvature of NESPAK 18 alignment. Its illegal emergence has already been discussed. Despite there being repeated requirement by the highest relevant forum for getting the alignment approved, the approval was not sought since it entailed disclosures of illegalities committed in the emergence of the alignment and also because necessary stakeholder agreements could not be obtained.

Gulzar Hussain Shah questions that against this backdrop why Ex-Commissioner was recklessly moving ahead with the land acquisition process? Why were payments started and overwhelmingly made in district Attock?

His inquiry report purports to establish rent seeking, conflict of interest, and corruption as the explanations of this

recklessness of a senior and experienced civil servant, and recommends an investigation by National Accountability Bureau into the “shenanigans of this syndicate, as partners in crime”, maintaining, “Necessary, and in some cases sufficient facts have already been collected and recorded in the report”.

The persons and business entities of Attock Loop and Paswal Zigzag rent seeking and syndicate are Mr Muhammad Mahmood, Ex Commissioner: Willfully instructed land acquisition payments of over PKR 2.3 billion despite clearly knowing the unapproved and illegal status of advertised alignment.

The report found multiple instances of conflict of interest. It alleges two retired military officers, Col (Retd.) Masood Mahmood, brother of Ex-Commissioner, and Col. (Retd.) Asim Ibrahim Paracha acted as benamidar of Mr Muhammad Mahmood.

Mr Waseem Tabish, Ex- LAC willfully paid over PKR 2.05 Billion in district Attock despite being fully aware that he was not legally empowered to do so.

The inquiry report points out that number of housing societies were connected with the Ring Road due to unethical silence, or unethical conduct of Member PPP Dr Farrukh Naveed, DC Attock, Mr Ali Annan Qamar, DC Rawalpindi Mr Anwar ul Haq Ex-DO RDA Amnara Khan, and ADC R Rawalpindi Shoaib Ali.

However, the other two members of the inquiry committee have denied the allegations made by Gulzar Hussain Shah.

Ex Commissioner Rawalpindi Anwar ul Haq differs with the findings of Gulzar Hussain Shah and states in his report that the alignment proposed by M/s NESPAK along with the technical and financial proposals were submitted to the PPP cell and was also not approved by any other competent forum.

The consultant submitted inception report wherein they had presented three options from N-5 to M-2 with geographical and other details. These route options were presented in the first steering committee meeting of Rawalpindi and Dr Salman Shah Advisor to the Chief Minister Punjab on Planning and Finance also attended the meeting as a special invitee.

Anwar ul Haq reported that Alignment option from Radio Station to Moorat Village M-2 was finalized. Since the ring road was getting terminated at the M-2, RDA consulted NHA officials for issuance of NOC for alignment to which NHA showed reluctance and raised concerns that this would cause traffic volume of about 33000 vehicles per day from GT Road will land up on Motorway.

Anwar ul haq states that the consultant proposed various options to extend RRR from Moorat to Sangjani without utilizing the CPEC route. Member CDA was of the view that the end point of RRR should be finalized at Sangjani N-5 as it coincides with the Margalla Avenue being constructed by CDA as this will ensure completion of a complete Ring Road loop.

Meanwhile SPD objected on the alignment as it ran too close to SPD installations. Therefore it was suggested by SPD to use the Hakla-DI Khan CPEC route for RRR as it was most suitable solution which they had earlier negotiated with NHA.

The consultants also pointed out the land acquisition cost between M-1 and Sangjani was quite exorbitant and the Paswal Road which is the property of Government of Punjab offered a cost effective option to use for the alignment. Hence Paswal Road was chosen due to reduced costs.

Later on, after the feedback from NHA and CDA the scope of the project was enhanced to include the Attock loop and its connectivity was also made with N-5 through Paswal. NESPAK also found the current alignment to be the most suitable for construction of Rawalpindi Ring Road. Current alignment was approved by Project Review Committee in February 2021.

It is pertinent to mention that Commissioner Rawalpindi Division is neither a regular member of PRC nor a co-opted member specifically for this project.

Anwar ul Haq denied allegations of corruption in his report and states that the inquiry report did not find out that number of housing societies (approved and unapproved) benefitted from RRR on the previous and alleged new alignment.

However, no substantial evidence could be found which suggested anything mala fide, rent seeking, or corruption on the part of government functionaries involved in the project. For this purpose, the beneficiaries societies were thoroughly investigated, personally heard by the inquiry committee and not even a single instance of any undue demand or kick-back was reported.

The third member of the committee, ADCR Shoaib Ali in his report revealed that “No evidence has come to the involvement of Public functionaries however windfall effect and rent seeking by large number of estate players was there due to the fact that alignment was made public after approval of the project.”

Gulzar Shah raises serious concerns as to the mechanism adopted to allow local access for the Ring Road through design amendments particularly in the Attock loop and Paswal Zigzag. ADCR Shoaib Ali answered him in his report that local access was provided on all the interchanges throughout the Ring Road not on Paswal alone.

On careful scrutiny, the Attock Loop seems to have been planned entirely on technical and justified grounds by the consultants and does not appear to benefit any particular vested group. The perusal of the RRR project design shows that no independent local access has been provided to anyone except through designated interchanges.

The alignment takes into consideration linkage with the airport and having shortest route available for commercial vehicles to and from DI Khan towards North and Central Punjab and Kashmir and also ensure true decongestion of the twin cities.

Therefore to ascertain the veracity of the allegations of rent seeking, the government would do well to set up a technical committee consisting of experts from PPP, Finance, Law and Engineering to determine whether the revised alignment is sound, justifiable, and feasible or not, instead of dragging this mega project through the mud.

Bahria Town Karachi and its Influential Patrons

The attempted land grab by Bahria Town Karachi has the fingerprints of political patronage all over it.



By Hamza Qureshi

T rue to its tradition, the Bahria Town administration tried to seize 150 acres of agricultural land in the hundred-year-old Kamal Khan Jokhio Goth, located next to Bahria Town, Karachi. Meanwhile, videos of riots and torture of the goth residents by Bahria Town and administration went viral on social media.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto is reported to have taken immediate notice and at least five officials involved including two police officers and three Revenue officers have been suspended or transferred. An inquiry report on this matter is awaited.

Police sources claim that SSP Malir has submitted his inquiry report, which denies involvement of police in the attempt to seize the goth. However, locals accuse that Gadap Police was part of operation as can be seen in the video clips circulating on the social media.

Residents of the goth have termed this matter as part of a multi-billion-rupee corruption scheme. They alleged involvement of a key minister of the PPP provincial government, Sindh Revenue Department, and probably the most significant figure in the PPP.

The first attempt to forcefully acquire the 150-acre tract of land came on 3 Ramadan. Some 12 people including 4 women were injured while protesting on the occasion. The administration of Bahria Town conceded to resistance.

On 24 Ramadan, when Bahria Town Karachi (BTK) reattempted with help of gunmen and police, three protestors were injured in firing while more than 20 people sustained injuries from baton charging. Three injured protestors were allegedly abducted by the Bahria Town administration and later handed over to Sohrab Goth police station. The incident led to uproar on social media. The victims said that all these cases were lodged under the supervision of the security in-charge of Bahria Town.

Insiders to the deal claim that it was agreed between BTK and the most important person in PPP, to make half the payment in advance and the other half would be paid after completion of job i.e., seizure of land. The transaction was planned to take place in Dubai. BTK was supposed to start the eviction after paying the first half.

But Bahria Town administration went on grabbing the lands of survey Nos. 110, 111, 112, 113 and 122 even before paying the advance. They misguided the local police and revenue officers that things were settled with political high ups and only ground-work needed to be performed. The intense resistance from Goth residents was anticipated which also went viral on social media. Civil society's reaction to BTK offences was also quick and powerful, bringing severe pressure on the Sindh government.

The top political figure of the PPP was

angered when things did not go as per the deal. He said the situation deteriorated due to the haste of Bahria Town and non-payment of advance. Provincial government, expecting strong reaction from federal government, was compelled to make a scapegoat of three Revenue officers and two police officers of Gadap Police Station. All blame for the fiasco was pinned on these low-level operatives.

Unprecedentedly, cases were registered against some employees of Bahria Town including lower-level security guards and security-in-charge Amir Zahoor. As per our sources, police knows the whereabouts of Amir Zahoor, who is currently residing in Bahria Town, but he hasn't been arrested. The security guards were arrested and released a few hours later.

The land of Surveys No. 110, 111, 112, 113 and 122, planned to be seized by BTK, have a total area of 150 acre. As per the chief of the goth, Jamal Khan Jokhio, the village dates back to 1912 when Kamal Khan Jokhio was issued a certificate during the British rule. He told this correspondent, "Since forefathers, we have been associated with this land."

He pointed out that the first attempts by Bahria Town were made in 2014 but were thwarted. He termed Bahria Town as a monster that is overshadowing everything around it and has now spread from Karachi to Jamshoro and Baluchistan.

Interestingly the thirst of Bahria Town is not decreasing. It needs the Goth's land, which the locals had previously refused to sell, for a new project. BTK then resorted to ingenious tactics to grab our land, Jokhio added. He further said that the Supreme Court had limited Bahria Town to 16,400 acres but presently Bahria Town has 82,000 acres of land and here is no one to contain them.

The village chief alleged that the land grabbing fiasco involved a high-ranking official of the Sindh government. He told The Truth International (TTI), "Our entire area is PPP voter, but let me make it clear that if the grabbing of our lands does not end, the PPP's vote bank here will be lost."

The chief of the Jokhio tribe and PPP MNA Jam Abdul Karim Jokhio has also said that if the government does not do justice, he will stand with his people rather than the party. Jamal Khan has not shown confidence upon PPP Chairman taking notice against land grabbing. He hopes that higher courts may grant them justice.

The Sindh High Court has ordered Bahria Town to return 200 acres of land belonging to Baba Faizu, a resident of Goth. But there is no law enforcement agency in Sindh that can implement the court order.

An official from Bahria Town, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the seizure was planned but some irregularities and haste spoiled the game. He claimed that Amir Zahoor settled a deal with a powerful provincial minister on instructions of Malik Riaz. The source said that the matter was settled in tens of billions of rupees, half of which was to be handed over in Dubai before the operation launch.

Moreover, all financials at lower levels were also sorted by Bahria Town. Sources told that the Bahria Town administration was worried that if the work could not be done even after payment, it would be difficult to get the money back. Therefore, they decided to initiate action first and pay later.

The important political figure was kept unaware of Bahria's decision. Bahria Town administration involved Police SHO Gadap Town Shaur Khan Bangash, Head-Muharrar Rao Mohammad Farooq and 3 revenue officers namely Mukhtiarkar Abdul Haq Chawar, Patwari Anwar Hussain, and Patwari Habibullah in this eviction campaign. Now all these officers have been suspended or transferred.

Sources said that a day before the operation, PKR 4 million had been provided to

the suspended officers by Bahria Town in advance. Total payment was agreed to be PKR 7 million. The SHO Gadap Town Shaur Khan Bangash did not even take his superiors into confidence and started the operation, which eventually backfired.

During the operation, when the police demolished the poultry sheds built on the land, the residents of Goth protested and the situation got tense. Several people were injured. This angered the senior political leader because of Bahria Town administration's failure to transfer the promised bribe. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari had to get involved in this matter to dilute the issue and address grievances of the people in goths. The first scapegoat was the former SHO Gadap Shaur Khan Bangash.

Sources said that if the mobile phone call and Whatsapp records of all those involved in ground operations are investigated, the involvement of high-ups involved in this incident can be unearthed.

Importantly, the plaintiff in the case, Jan Sher Khan, is being pressured to withdraw the case with threats of dire consequences, which is perhaps why the plaintiff has kept his mobile phone number turned off.

Détente or Escalation?

Conflicting signals and conflicting interpretations surround the Sharifs' recent dealings with the powers that be.

By Ahmad Waleed

There has never been a dull moment in the life of the Sharif family since Nawaz Sharif, the eldest son of the late Mian Muhammad Sharif, became the prime minister of Pakistan for the third time in 2013. It all started with the historic dharna by his opponent Imran Khan in 2014.

From Panama Papers scandal to the Raiwind Road construction and from Ashiana Housing Scheme scandal to Tosha Khana vehicles numerous cases have been filed in different courts against the Sharif family by the National Accountability (NAB), the anti-graft body of Pakistan.

In the money laundering and income beyond means corruption case, the family is accused of swindling over PKR 7 billion from the national exchequer. The Sharifs say the charges are politically motivated.

However, Mr Sharif is down but not out of political scene of the country. The country's politics continues to revolve around Nawaz Sharif. He remains in the news be it his own hard-hitting speeches or the NAB cases against him.

He is yet again in the news as an Accountability Court has ordered the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan to sell his unclaimed shares and properties

and deposit the proceeds with the state treasury. There are two more accused in the case – former president Asif Ali Zardari and former premier Yousaf Raza Gillani.

Nawaz had already been declared proclaimed offender in three cases – Alazizia Steel Mills, Avenfiled Apartments, and Toshakhana Vehicles reference. However, his counsel had pleaded that Mr Sharif was 'willing to return to Pakistan and face the due process of law and justice, and that is only because of the advice of his doctors in London that he is forced to delay his return to Pakistan.'

The cases against the three politicians were filed by the NAB on the alleged violation of rules of Toshakhana (state gift repository). The NAB reference also involved Omni Group CEO Khawaja Anwer Majeed and his son Khawaja Abdul Ghani Majeed for extending illegal benefit to the accused, Yousaf Raza Gillani, who facilitated them (Nawaz and Zardari) to keep the luxury vehicles gifted to them by the foreign dignitaries by 'illegally and dishonestly' relaxing the procedures governing their use vide a Cabinet Division memorandum of 2007.

The anti-graft body reference says 'through illegal and dishonest means for their benefit and interest' the accused, Nawaz and Zardari, retained the vehicles against the nominal payments of 15 percent of their value instead of depositing them in the Toshakhana. All the three politicians, nevertheless, plead not guilty.

The Accountability Court has ordered the authorities concerned to auction the unclaimed properties and assets owned by former prime minister and deposit the proceeds with the treasury under section 88 of the Criminal Procedures Code (CrPC).

However, there are certain properties attached have claimed by the family members. Attachment of around 12 acres of agricultural land (guava orchard) in Mouza Manak Lahore and a 24-kanal fish farm in Mouza Badokisani Lahore has been objected to by Mohammad Ashraf and Umair Razzaq respectively.

In another plea, Maryam Nawaz, daughter of Nawaz Sharif, has challenged the attachment of properties of the Sharif family in Murree and Changla Gali with other properties frozen in connection with the Toshakhana reference. Maryam has also filed objection petition against the attachment of House No 24 A&B, III, Hall Road, Murree, and a house in Changla Gali, Abbottabad, in Toshakhana case.

Maryam has stated in the petition both the houses were owned by her late mother, Kulsoom Nawaz and these were purchased much before the period mentioned in the reference and the ownership devolved upon the legal heirs as per the judgement and decree dated 14 May 2019 and the houses were divided properties in the joint ownership of all legal heirs. These properties have



been released from the attachment by the NAB court.

Now, only the unclaimed properties and assets will be put on sale. The court has also directed the chairman SECP to sell out the attached shares owned by Nawaz Sharif – 467,950 shares in Mohammad Bakhsh Textile Mills; 343,425 in Hudaibya Paper Mills; 22,213 in Hudaibya Engineering Co; and 48,606 shares in Ittefaq Textile Mills.

The deputy commissioners of Lahore and Sheikhupura have been directed to sell immoveable properties within 60 days which included House No 135 Upper Mall Lahore and 88.4 kanals of agriculture land in Ferozwattan in Sheikhupura district.

Moreover, the excise and taxation offices of Islamabad and Lahore have been directed to take possession of the vehicles with the assistance of local police and sell them within 60 days. The vehicles include Toyota Land Cruiser Model 2010, Mercedes Model 1973, Mercedes-Benz Model 1991, tractor model 2011, and tractor model 2015.

The court also directed the managers of MCB Bank, New Garden Town, Lahore; and the Standard Chartered Bank branches

at Gulberg Islamic, Wapda Town Lahore; Manager Allied Bank, New Garden Town; and Manager Bank Alfalah, Y-Block DHA Branch to transfer the funds held in the accounts of Mr Sharif to the state treasury within 30 days.

The total amount available in these banks is equivalent to PKR604,664. Only PKR 30,000 balance is found in two branches of Standard Chartered Bank, while the three other branches of the Standard Chartered have EUR 566, USD 698 and GBP 498.

The verdict is a big blow to Nawaz Sharif who has been hitting the establishment through his speeches from London. However, on the other hand it seems the new 'arrangement' has worked after Shahbaz Sharif's release from jail on bail in money laundering case while Maryam Nawaz has softened her stance against the power circles in Rawalpindi.

Apparently it has been decided that Shahbaz Sharif, who is known for his appeasement policy, will be calling the shots in Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz. The coming months may witness new trends in the politics of the country.

Is Punjab Trying to Wrest Sharifs' Jati Umra Estate?

While the government says it is the wheels of justice grinding exceedingly fine, the Sharifs call it political victimisation. The matter is now in court.

Evil Machinations or the Wheels of Justice?

By Shahid Hussain

The Sharif family seems to be under some apprehension they are about to lose control of their Jati Umra residential complex. Twice this month already, alarm has been raised at the current abode of Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President Maryam Nawaz Sharif the government was moving in on the property with heavy machinery accompanied by enough officials to overpower and dispossess its occupants.

On both occasions, party workers were called in to mount resistance, who kept vigil late into the night and left after announcing the menace had been averted.

The matter is now in court. A Lahore civil judge has passed a restraining order, prohibiting the Punjab Government from making any change to the ownership of Jati Umra Raiwind property, the residence of former premier Nawaz Sharif and his family.

The court sought record from Board of Revenue (BoR) for 27 April on a suit filed by the children of Abbas Sharif, late brother of former Prime Minister Muhammad Nawaz Sharif.

The Sharif family have moved court maintaining the authorities are manoeuvring the ownership record of Jati Umra at the behest of the incumbent government.

The government claims the property was owned by Punjab Government which was allotted to Waheeda Begum in 1989 when Mian Nawaz Sharif was Chief Minister Punjab. Later this property was transferred to Shamim Akhtar, the mother of Mian Nawaz Sharif.

As per record, the BoR has written a letter to Additional Deputy Commissioner (Revenue) on 9 April 2021 for cancellation of the allotment of land to Waheeda Begum. She was allotted the government land through mutation No. 1099 during the first term of Mian Nawaz Sharif as Chief Minister Punjab in 1989.

It all started when the BoR was asked to check the status of mutation whereby government land was allotted to Waheeda Begum but no record of allotment was found in the record room of Settlement and Rehabilitation (S&R) wing. Deputy Secretary (S&R) BoR sought review of mutation to Waheeda Begum in 1989 and subsequent mutation to Shamim Akhtar. Deputy Secretary S&R sought restoration the original status of this property as it was before 1989.

Subsequently, Yousaf Abbas, Abdul Aziz, Sara Abbas and Salma Abbas, filed suit in civil court against Punjab government, Chief Secretary, Chief Settlement Commissioner, LDA, Commissioner office, Tehsil-dar, and Patwari of Raiwind.

It was stated in the suit that Sharif family is known for their political struggle and services in the country. It was mentioned that Muhammad Nawaz Sharif has served as Prime Minister and the Chief Minister respectively for a number of terms. Whereas Shahbaz Sharif is presently the Leader of Opposition in the National Assembly of Pakistan and facing baseless cases fabricated at the behest of incumbent government.

It was stated in suit that Sharif family is being politically victimized in every possible manner and the incumbent government is out to illegally harass, humiliate and tease them in every possible manner. Yousaf Abbas stated that authorities are interfering in the possession of his family of more than three decades.

According to Yousaf Abbas, all the constructions over the land had been done as per law and rules and after procuring all the relevant permissions. All the site-plans have been duly approved from the concerned departments. The plaintiff submitted he would produce all the documentation before the court. None of the government departments have ever raised even the slightest objection regarding



any irregularity let alone illegality pertaining to the suit property, he added.

Yousaf Abbas and his siblings stated that they have approached the officials to attest the inheritance mutation of the deceased Begum Shamim Akhtar but their right was denied and no step whatsoever have been taken by the officials in this regard. The plaintiff stated that Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, Abbas Sharif and their sister Kausar Yousaf are the only legal heirs of the Begum Shamim Akhtar.

The Sharif family claims the Punjab government and authorities are already working on some iniquitous scheme detrimental to the title and possession of Jati Umra.

The court observed that family of Late Abbas Sharif has annexed the copy of ownership documents which makes it a good arguable case. The court therefore ordered the status quo to be maintained regarding the Jati Umra property, adding the stay order can be modified at any stage on disclosing of new facts.

The court sought written statements from government and its departments and directed the process server to serve the copy of suit and relevant record to all respondents. The court also ordered to serve the summonses to the authorities through registered post and urgent mail service.



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A Brief History of Raiwind Farmhouses



By Sattar Khan

The Early Days

Purchasing of land and construction of Raiwind farmhouses started in 1992 during first tenure of Nawaz Sharif when Sharifs purchased around 5,000 kanal land in different villages in Raiwind and constructed Raiwind Farmhouse on 401 kanals 10 marlas of land within a boundary wall in the name of Shamim Farms at Mauza Manak Raiwind.

Buying the land, constructing palatial farmhouses and shifting to Raiwind throughout the years associated with many aspects of Sharifs political life both good aspects and not so good aspects. All the time elected with a thumping majority and all the time shunted out from the government under one garb of another by the powerful establishment.

Before shifting to Raiwind Farmhouse, Sharif family never heard about militant threats before which subsequently resulted in heavy deployment of oversize manpower around Raiwind farmhouses and over-size installation of security equipment – most of the time inviting the wrath of the Sharifs' political opponents and media.

While many of the stories told about this Sharif family estate were based on hearsay, sometime authentic information also surfaced.

Documents of ministry of interior, FIA and CBR reveals that Sharif family had spent PKR 24 crore 73 lakhs on the buying of land and constructions of Raiwind Farmhouses. Only two persons of the family spent money on the buying and construction of Raiwind Farmhouses: Mian Nawaz Sharif who spent PKR 17 crore 11 lakhs, and his father Mian Mohammad Sharif who spent PKR 7 crore 62 lakhs. However, certain purchases by Mian Mohammad Sharif were made in collaboration with his wife Begum Shamim Akhtar. None of the other family members of Sharifs had spent a single penny on the purchase and construction of Farmhouse.

Cost of Raiwind Land and Cost of Raiwind Farmhouses

Cost of land	PKR 1 crore 23 lakhs
Cost of building constructions	PKR 19 crore 80 lakhs
Additional Misc expenditures	PKR 2 crore 97 lakhs
Cost of remaining constructions	PKR 70 lakhs
Grand Total:	PKR 24 crore 73 lakhs

Year/Time Span – how much land purchased and how much amount paid

Year (Time Span)	Purchasing land	Price
1992 (4 May 1992 to 23 May 1992)	144 kanals 2 Marlas	PKR 51,04,387
1993 (5th Jan 1993 to 9 Dec 1993)	189 kanals 16 marlas	PKR 44,46,359
1994 (2nd Feb 1994 to 18 Dec 1994)	29 kanals 5 marlas	PKR 10,78,437
1994	19 Kanals 3 marlas	PKR 7,30,093
Total	401 kanals 10 marlas	PKR 1,23,02,328

Taking into account of this 401 kanals and 10 marlas on which Farmhouse was constructed within the boundary wall, the purchase of the land was started on 4 May 1992, with the purchase of 144 kanals 2 marlas (from 4th May 1992 to 23 May 1992) against an investment of PKR 51,04,387 in the name of Shamim Akhtar:

In the year 1993 (from 5th Jan 1993 to 9 Dec 1993), 189 kanals 16 marlas land was purchased against an investment of PKR 44,46,359 in the name of Mrs Shamim Akhtar:

In the year 1994 (from 2nd Feb 1994 to 18 Dec 1994), 29 kanals 5 marlas land was purchased against an investment of PKR 10,78,437 in the name of Mrs Shamim Akhtar:

Also in the year 1994, a land piece of 19 kanals 3 marlas were purchased against an investment of PKR 7,30,093 in the name of Mian Mohammad Sharif. In totality, 401 kanals 10 marlas were purchased by Sharif family for Raiwind Farmhouse and paid PKR 1,23,02,328.

Within a boundary wall of Raiwind Farmhouse, 7 constructions took place by 1999 which includes residences of Mian Mohammad Sharif, Mian Nawaz Sharif, Mian Shahbaz Sharif, Maryam Nawaz and Capt (R) Safdar.

In addition to these residences, Guest House (internal), Gymnasium Building and Kitchen Building were constructed within the boundary wall. While outside the boundary wall four constructions were made which includes guest house (external), staff residences, cattle farm building and miscellaneous civil works.

The construction period of the Raiwind Farmhouse is from 1992 to 1999

Residences – Covered area and Construction Cost

Residences	Covered area	Construction Cost
Mian Nawaz Sharif	57,000 sq. ft.	PKR 12 crore 21 lakh
Mian Shahbaz Sharif	29,000 sq. ft.	PKR 4 crore 90 lakh
Maryam Nawaz and Capt (R) Safdar	10,000 sq. ft.	PKR 58 lakhs
Mian Mohammad Sharif and Begum Shamim Akhtar	9,000 sq. ft.	PKR 50 lakhs

The most expensive house within the Raiwind Farmhouse was constructed for Mian Nawaz Sharif and his family (double story) covering the area of 57,000 square feet. The construction cost of the house was PKR 12 crore 21 lakhs. Construction started in 1997 and completed in June 1999. All the payment of construction was paid by Mian Nawaz Sharif himself to Ansar Shaikh, contractor of Raiwind Farmhouse.

Most expensive after Nawaz Sharif house was the house of Mian Shahbaz Sharif (double story) which was covering the area of 29,000 square feet. The construction cost of Mian Shahbaz Sharif was PKR 4 crore 90 lakhs. Construction was started in 1997 and completed in 1999. All the payments were made by Mian Nawaz Sharif.

Mian Mohammad Sharif and his wife Mrs Shamim Akhtar residence construction cost is PKR 50 lakh. Construction started in June 1992 and completed in March 1999.

Maryam Nawaz and her husband Capt (R) Safdar's house (double story) covering the area of 10,000 square feet and cost of construction of house was just PKR 58 lakhs and it was completed before March 1997.

Only two persons of Sharif family spent money buying land and construction of farmhouses Nawaz Sharif and Mian Mohammad Sharif – but comparison of their declaring income in the income tax returns during 8 years from 1992 to 2000 and amount spent for the

buying and construction of farmhouses reveals that both the Sharifs declared income was much less than the amount they spent for the purchase of Raiwind land and construction of Raiwind farmhouses.

Comparison of Declared Amount and the Amount spent on Raiwind Farmhouses

Person	Declared Income during 8 Years of Raiwind buying and construction	Year Wise Income as declared in Income Tax Returns	Month Wise Income as declared in Income Tax Returns	Spending on buying and construction of Raiwind farmhouses	Difference between 8 Years declared Income and Spending on Raiwind
Mian Nawaz Sharif	PKR 24 lakh	PKR 3 lakh	PKR 25,000	PKR 17 crore and 11 lakh	PKR 16 crore and 87 lakh
Mian Mohammad Sharif	PKR 1 crore and 65 lakh	PKR 20 lakh and 71,000	PKR 1 lakh and 71,000	PKR 7 crore and 62 lakh	PKR 6 crore and 98 lakh

Mian Nawaz Sharif had declared his income tax of PKR 24 lakhs during 8 years from 1992-93 to 1999-2000 in his income tax returns filed to income tax department which reveals that he was earning PKR 3 lakh per year and PKR 25,000 per month, but the same Nawaz Sharif has spent PKR 17 crore 11 lakhs on the construction of Raiwind Farmhouses during the same 8 years from 1992 to 2000.

Similarly, Mian Mohammad Sharif, father of Mian Nawaz Sharif, has declared his income tax of PKR 1 crore 65 lakhs during 8 years from 1992-1993 to 1999-2000 in his income tax returns filed to income tax department which reveals he was earning around PKR 20 lakh 62,000 per year and PKR 1 lakh 71,000 per month, but the same late Mian Mohammad Sharif spending PKR 7 crore 62 lakhs on the construction of Raiwind Farmhouses during the same 8 years period – how it is possible only Sharifs know.



Similarly late Mian Mohammad Sharif in his wealth tax returns filed with income tax department for 8 years from 1992-93 to 1999-2000 showing he was having wealth worth of PKR 4 crore 12 lakh in 1992-1993 but showing his wealth increased to PKR 11 crore 50 lakhs in 1999-2000 which is an increase of PKR 7 crore 70 lakhs – now how it is possible that Mian Sharif earned PKR 1 crore 65 lakh during 8 years but accumulated assets worth of PKR 11 crore 50 lakh during the same 8 years?

Late Begum Shamim Akhtar, mother of Nawaz Sharif, who had shown income worth PKR 2 crore 24 lakh during 8 years from 1992-93 to 1999-2000 in her income tax returns filed to income tax department. The most interesting aspect was Begum Shamim Akhtar showing her wealth in 1994 was PKR 3 crore 80 lakh and liabilities of PKR 6 crore 94 lakhs but in the year 1999-2000 her wealth worth increased to PKR 11 crore 31 lakhs and liabilities reduced to PKR 3 crore 51 lakhs.

Unbelievable in terms of taxation as during these years the wealth increased to PKR 7 crore 51 lakhs and the liabilities reduced to PKR 3 crore 43 while income tax returns filed during the same 8 years are silent. How asset can increase and liabilities decrease without having any income, only Sharif family knows.

Sharif family contention was that the Raiwind land was purchased from the funds advanced by M/s Ittefaq Brothers which ultimately proved as baseless on two accounts: Firstly, no such advance is shown in the balance sheet of M/s Ittefaq Brothers for the relevant years; and secondly, the source of repayment of advance has been shown as the receipt of foreign remittances and the encashment of FEBC's and DBCs.

Sharif family's second contention was that funds for this purpose were received from Ms/Chaudhary Sugar Mills Ltd., but this contention also not carrying any proof as the construction of Raiwind Farmhouses have neither been shown in the balance sheet of M/s Chaudhary Sugar Mills Ltd., nor in the wealth tax returns of Sharif family.

Luxury imported branded products purchased for Raiwind Farmhouses

In addition to spending millions of rupees on the buying and construction of Raiwind Farmhouses, Sharif family had also spent huge amount on the branded luxury imported products for their farmhouses – we are not taking about local products.

Imported Luxury Bath rooms and Kitchen Products

Imported Products	Quantity	Price
Jacuzzi	2	2 lakh 60,000 Dirham Pak PKR 39 lakhs
Saunas	2	64,000 Dirhams Pak PKR 9 lakh 60,000
Bath Tub	46	Around PKR 34 lakhs
Sanitary Ware Sets	50	Around PKR 15 lakhs
Glass Bocks	1,250	Around PKR 50 lakhs
Ceramics Tiles	451	Around PKR 30 lakhs

First taking only the imported branded products and that too only meant for bathrooms, kitchens and lawns which cost Sharifs 12 lakh Dirhams in 1999 which is equivalent to Pakistani PKR 1 crore 80 lakhs which only includes Jacuzzi, saunas, gold plated bathroom showers, gold plated sanitary products, etc.

Only for the import of luxury branded products, Sharif paid USD 56,000 which is equivalent to Pakistan PKR 30 lakhs 24,000 and paid sales tax of PKR 32 lakhs. Except few luxury imported products, average price of the branded products was 6,000 dirhams which was equivalent to Pakistani PKR 90,000.

2 Jacuzzi worth 2 lakh 60,000 dirhams equivalent to Pak PKR 39 lakhs

2 Saunas worth 64,000 dirhams equivalent to Pak PKR 9 lakhs 60,000

In addition to these two expensive imported products, Sharifs imported 1,797 products from abroad especially from Dubai only for Raiwind Farmhouses bathrooms, kitchens etc etc. More than 5 lakh dirhams equivalent to PKR 75 lakh were spent only on the import of famous brand Vellory and Boch products. Out of these 1,798 products, 46 were Bath Tubs, 50 Sanitary Ware Sets, 1,250 Glass Blocks and 451 Ceramics Tiles. Aluminium Windows worth PKR 1 crore 63 lakhs were imported from abroad.



Marble works were worth PKR 3 crore 83 lakhs – of which PKR 2 crore 71 lakhs worth of marble tiles were installed inside Mian Nawaz Sharif's residence which includes marble tiles worth PKR 56 lakhs in a washroom and worth PKR 4 lakh inside a kitchen. Marble tiles worth PKR 1 crore 12 lakh were installed inside Mian Shahbaz Sharif residence.

Interwood Associates (Pvt.) Ltd., which supplied furniture for Raiwind Farmhouse were paid 5 times PKR 50 lakh each, totalling to PKR 2 crore 50 lakhs. PKR 26 lakh were paid for Raiwind Farmhouse Paint works. Primarily ICI and Majid Paint House Ferozepur Road supplied the paints for Raiwind Farmhouse but there are many others as well.

Though Sharifs purchased every product of their liking and paid whatever amount was, yet there are instances of Sharifs paying less than the amount agreed. For instance, Sharifs agreed to purchase marble tiles from Ital Pak for a price of PKR 3 crore 87 lakhs and Ital Pak supplied the same while sending final bill. But Sharif ultimately paid PKR 3 crore 41 lakhs, short by PKR 42 lakhs.

Similarly, FreeZol Private Ltd, which supplied air-conditioning and heating system to Raiwind, were paid less than the agreed amount. Tuff pavers' suppliers were also paid PKR 19 lakh less than the agreed amount. The suppliers were paid only PKR 15 lakh out of agreed amount of PKR 34 lakh till 1999.

One thing is very important, first ever and former Mayor of Islamabad Shaikh Ansar Aziz was the contractor of Raiwind Farmhouses and everything which was in documentation was prepared by him or mostly he was the person dealing with the suppliers of the products whether Pakistani or from abroad.

Shaikh Ansar Aziz was also among them who were paid less than the agreed amount of contract. As per the documents, Shaikh Ansar Aziz signed the agreement with Sharifs for the construction of Raiwind Farmhouses at a cost of PKR 4 crore 33 lakhs but Sharif paid him PKR 3 crore 75 lakhs leaving a balance of PKR 58 lakhs. The balance of amount of PKR 58 lakh was yet to be paid to Shaikh Ansar Aziz when Sharifs left for Jaddah.

Now Shaikh Ansar Aziz himself mentioned this episode in a statement under section 164 before the FIA at the time of enquiry against Raiwind Farmhouses. Now this only Sharifs or Sheikh Ansar Aziz know whether the remaining amount of PKR 58 lakh was paid or not. But one thing is certain that Sharifs made him the first ever Mayor of Islamabad in 2016.

1009 Acres Land to LEPZT Irritate Powerful Establishment

Few insiders knows that buying land and constructing cost on Sharifs owned Raiwind Farmhouses has never been an issue between the Sharifs and powerful establishment. But in 1998, during the second term of Nawaz Sharif and first term of Shahbaz Sharif as Chief Minister Punjab, the relations between Sharif government and powerful GHQ started to take a turn for the worse much before unconstitutional removal of Sharif government on 12 October 1999 by General Pervez Musharraf.

The pivotal incident in this connection took place on 15 July 1998, over three months before General Pervez Musharraf assumed charge as the Chief of Army Staff on 6 October 1998, when Punjab government transferred 1009 acres of land in Raiwind to Lahore Export Processing Zone Trust (LEPZT).

The Punjab demonstrated an unparalleled enthusiasm by issuing instructions to then DC Kasur on 14 July 1998 to issue section 4 notification. DC Kasur took only one day to issue notification on the very next day on 15 July, which apparently irritated the GHQ.

The transfer took place in a non-transparent circumstances, keeping the ministry of defence and GHQ in complete dark, and in violation of the Acquisition Act 1894. The transferred land was situated in Buchoki Majha and Babliana Otar Villages of Raiwind a dozen kilometres from Sharif's Raiwind farms houses and a few kilometres from the international border with India.

The move ignored the clear cut instructions of the ministry of defence and GHQ discouraging the establishment of new industries and industrial estates within 25-50 KMs of the international border without associating GHQ before the final decision.

The LEPZT, which was not a charitable purpose driven trust but was meant to supervise business and industrial activities, was then dominated by LCCI's stalwarts including Hussain Nawaz, elder son of Nawaz Sharif, and Tariq Shafi, first cousin of Nawaz Sharif, who later on appeared as star witness to defend Sharif family in Panama Papers cases both in the Supreme Court and before the JIT.

The initiative came from none other than Nawaz Sharif himself when he went on official visit to Malaysia on 1 August 1997 and during his visit an agreement was signed between Punjab Industrial Development Board (PIDB) and a Malaysian firm M/s Inno-Enhance SDN-BHD for the establishment of an Export Processing Zone near Raiwind Lahore.

A land can be acquired either for government department or for a company registered under Companies Act 1984 or a charitable trust registered under Societies Act 1860. LEPZT was a trust, whose function was to take care of business and industrial activities was not registered under Companies Act or under Societies Act. However, LEPZT was registered on 27 April 1998 with the Registrar Lahore just three months before the transfer of 1009 acres of land.

Ignoring a vital point which restricted the establishment of industrial estate within 25-50 KMs of border area, can be gauged from a



fact that just one month and 25 days before transferring the land, on 23 May 1998, the representatives of GHQ, federal ministry of Industries and representatives of all the four provincial industries departments held a detailed meeting to consider location of major strategic industries particularly on India-Pakistan bordering areas of Punjab province.

After detailed deliberations, the meeting took a few decisions primarily aimed at discouraging the establishment of new industries within areas close to border with India. However, in case the Punjab government wants to set up an industrial estates between 25-50 km belt, they may consult ministry of defence and GHQ before taking the final decision.

No such consultation or coordination took place in this case to bring the GHQ in the loop. Later on, when Punjab government forwarded the agreement to the federal ministry of industries to finalize it, the ministry raised certain objections and observations.



Among them were two vital points. One - a provincial government cannot sign such agreement; and two, a decision had already been taken to discourage establishment of industrial zone within the certain limits of international border.

Moreover, various other matters became contentious between LCCI, LEPZT, PIDB and Punjab government and Malaysian firm. In this context, Malaysian firm representative Dr. G. S. Dhillon met Punjab CM Shahbaz Sharif and on his instructions discussed the matter with LCCI but has also examined the possibilities of LCCI cooperation because PIDB stood dissolved. He offered to sponsor the EPZ on 50-50 shares. He also met DG LDA and offered him the construction of Ring Road.

Later on the federal government expressed its inability to Malaysian firm in this regard and told it would not be possible for the government to involve in any new investment venture but the tension between GHQ and Sharif government refused to die down.

Operation Manhunt

Following increased suspicious movements of suspects particularly non-natives in Raiwind especially the surrounding areas of Raiwind Farmhouse, Special Branch Punjab has conducted a secret operation in 2010 officially named “Operation Manhunt” originally meant to be a combing intelligence operation.

Shahbaz Sharif was the Chief Minister Punjab and Yousaf Raza Gillani was the Prime Minister and Mian Nawaz Sharif was on a full-throttle attack on PPP federal government.

This secret “Operation Manhunt” was conducted only in Raiwind with specific focus on surroundings of Sharifs Raiwind Farmhouses including its 12 villages, 10 colonies and 6 main roads to determine about inmates of houses surrounding Sharifs farmhouses – non-natives living in the area without families, native or non-natives criminals, arms smugglers, local persons providing rented houses to non-natives, students whether native or non-native and owners or administrators of madaris and mosques, vulnerable points on roads, bridges, and thick clusters of trees or shrubbery.

Punjab Special Branch deployed 10 teams comprising of 50 police personnel. A police officer of the rank of SSP was leading the operation and 6 DSPs were participating as heads of different teams while final report was submitted to the Additional IG Special Branch Punjab.

Basically, the operation was meant to trace the suspicious non-native persons who were living in the surroundings of Sharif farms houses for few weeks or few months.

Astonishingly, the final report of secret “Operation Manhunt” declared surroundings of Sharif farms houses as “most insecure place”. In other words, although Sharifs Raiwind farmhouses remained under intense security arrangements, the surrounding areas were declared insecure.

The report stopped short of suggesting Sharifs to leave Raiwind Farmhouses and to shift to some other, more secure place, as high ups considered it most inappropriate for Sharif shifting from Raiwind Farmhouses. Decision of shifting from Raiwind would hurt the public perception about Sharifs insecurity and vulnerability despite being Prime Minister and chief minister Punjab. Many official claims that Shahbaz Sharif was living in DHA rather than in Raiwind Farmhouses – may be for some other reasons as well.

CID Report on Life Threats to Sharifs

While then PPP federal government in 2012 kept on personally requesting and conveying to Sharif brothers that they are on the hit list of terrorists, Sharif brother strongly believed that such warning is nothing but to stop them launching anti-PPP agitation.

But when the Crime Investigation Department (now Counter Terrorism Department) controlled by the Punjab Chief Minister and headed by Additional IG Malik Iqbal came out with a secret report in 2012 that Sharif family was facing a serious life threat in Raiwind, both the brothers and Sharif family suspended their routine official and unofficial life for two days.

Interestingly, a few months before the same CID had issued a similar warning of life threats on visiting Sir Lankan cricket team, which ultimately proved correct.

As per the warning of CID Punjab, Baitullah Mehsud’s Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had dispatched one of its hard-core activists named Obaidullah to Lahore to closely monitor the movements of both Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif, particularly their movements from Raiwind Farmhouses.

Ubaidullah remained in Raiwind for more than two weeks, during which time he remained busy monitoring the routes frequently used by Sharif family and CID came to know of his movements in Raiwind after three weeks of his departure.

Though the life threats against both the Sharif brothers were serious as per the claims of CID, yet it was confusing as Nawaz Sharif and Shahbaz Sharif were soft on Taliban and Al Qaeda as compared to other major political players of the country. However, the warning actually got the alarming proportion when it was mentioned in the report that Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) had logistic and technical support from Lashkar-e-Jhangvi (LJ).

It was the Lashkar-e-Jhangvi which had blown up a portion of Raiwind road called Bhopatian, often used by both the brothers being a prime minister and chief minister Punjab, during 1997-1999. That blast killed three persons while Nawaz Sharif managed to escape since he departed the spot before the blast. A few hard-core activists of Lashkari-e-Jhangvi were arrested including Noor Gul of Peshawar and Atiqur Rehman of Kasur.

Lashkari-e-Jhangvi (LJ) was still wielding much power to help Batiullah Mehsud lead Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) to execute such a deadly operation.

Interestingly, earlier abortive attack on Nawaz Sharif during his second stint had even paved the way for behind the scene contacts between the jailed leadership of LJ and the portion of leadership of Sipah-e-Sahaba Pakistan (SSP) that enjoyed the confidence of Sharifs.

For the purpose of pursuing LJ to give up its subversive activities, at least two unannounced and secret meetings were arranged in 1998 and 1999 between SSP and jailed leadership of LJ particularly Malik Ishaque.

On both these occasions, the jailed activist Malik Ishaque categorically conveyed a strong-worded message to Sharifs that until and unless LJ takes revenge of its more than three dozen hard-core activists, who were killed in fake police encounters, LJ could not guarantee sectarian peace and harmony in the province.

At least three police officers of the rank of additional IGs including the one who was holding the portfolio of Additional IG CTD and later on was also appointed IG Punjab also provided cover arranging these secret meetings with Malik Ishaq in jail.

So much so that late LJ leader Malik Ishaq was offered to contest the elections and become MPA. After his controversial release from Jail, Malik Ishaq started his political campaign for Punjab assembly. However, certain influential members of the establishment prevented this from happening. Even Shaikh Akram, who had then newly joined PML-N, had also said it would be difficult for him to continue with PML-N if Malik Ishaq contested the elections.

Another such report was filed soon after Nawaz Sharif becoming Prime Minister for the third term and was about to celebrate his first Eid during his third tenure. As a result of this report, Nawaz Sharif suspended his 90 per cent Eid related activities at Raiwind Farmhouse and held massive rounds of official meetings to counter these threats on Sharif family lives in Raiwind Farmhouse.

Security Arrangements in Jati Umra

Soon after these reports and the secret "Operation Manhunt", Punjab government started releasing additional money and deploying additional security personals. Sharifs faced severe criticism from their political opponents and some time from media over these measures.

But Sharifs were actually facing insecurity in Raiwind Farmhouses despite heavy deployment of security personnel and despite heavy spending from provincial kitty. Punjab government released PKR 9 crore in 2011, PKR 17 crore in 2014, and PKR 37 crore in 2015 under Secret Funds Accounts. These expenses were in addition to the funds already specified in the budget 2015 for the security of Sharif family particularly in Raiwind Farmhouses.



Further break up reveals that PKR 26 crore was spent for erecting a 4.4-kilometre fence, installing 90 CCTV cameras, 100 LED lights and 20 elevated checkpoints; PKR 4 crore on purchase of security equipment; PKR 2 crore for paying the police employees appointed for security; and PKR 5 crore for purchasing security vehicles.

A substantial port of these spending on Sharif security in Raiwind Farmhouse has also attributed towards the launching of political agitation against PM Sharif by Imran Khan and Tahir ul Qadri. Many officials were convinced that the situation could provide militants an opportunity to attack Raiwind Farmhouses. In this connection various summaries were moved within Punjab government departments declaring the security arrangements at Raiwind Farmhouses were not fool proof.

Up to 2,751 police officials were appointed for Sharif security including 2,087 law enforcers working under CCPO Lahore, 169 officials of Punjab Constabulary, 44 from Rawalpindi police, nine from Bhakkar, 62 from traffic police, 33 VVIP security officials of special branch, 88 of special branch, and 75 private security officials.

The Brewing Scam of Online Trading

Regulators keep mum as shady offshore companies masquerading as brokers tuck into the savings of small-time Pakistanis in the name of lucrative investment in foreign bourses.



By Fahad Thaheem

Dubious offshore companies operating in a regulatory vacuum are using deceptive marketing over digital platforms to lure hordes of Pakistanis into investing in foreign stocks and currencies. This is a highly fraught situation because the investors will have no legal recourse if the broker of their choice vanished without trace.

OctaFX, a company registered in Cyprus, is generating investment in foreign currencies trade and stocks from Pakistan illegally. This company is doing aggressive but deceptive online marketing through social media in Pakistan to lure investors with promises of earning handsome profit in trade of foreign currencies.

Details gathered by The Truth International (TTI) reveal that OctaFX is the third largest downloaded trading app in Pakistan. As the company is not registered in Pakistan, it is doing business in the country for the past many years in violation of the SECP and State Bank of Pakistan regulations. Thus, any trade or investment through this offshore company is highly risky and it can deprive investors of their money any time.

The company claims to be facilitating investment in American stock markets, but it is neither registered in the United States nor the United Kingdom, probably because these countries have tight regulatory regimes to preclude fraud.

Regulators in advanced markets enforce stringent reporting requirements on brokerage houses through heavily penalties. In particular, the US, the UK, and the EU have all taken strict measures against companies offering binary options. Consequently, shady offshore companies like OctaFX have targeted Pakistan, India, China and some other countries to expand their illegal business.

In Pakistan, the Securities and Exchange Commission of Pakistan (SECP) and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) also discourage binary options. However, companies like OctaFX and IQOptions continue to generate business and investment from the country through deceptive online marketing in stark violations of this policy.

The noted Pakistani investment banker Ali Farid Khwaja Recently wrote a letter to the concerned officials in Pakistan raising the unlawful business activities of OctaFX and some other offshore companies, which are generating business from Pakistan illegally. He pointed out that OctaFX is falsely marketing itself as a foreign investment and stock brokerage.

Khwaja says the company is targeting the retail savers in tier 2 and 3 cities in Pakistan and offering people investment opportunities in the US stocks, binary schemes, and trading of

foreign currencies, which is a clear violation of the financial laws of the country.

He said that SECP must involve FIA and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) to discourage unlawful business of OctaFX and other such offshore companies. He claimed that some Lahore-based jewelers are involved in this fraudulent business, which can deprive people of millions of dollars in case the authorities concerned in the country did not take any action against this company.

Forexbrokers.com, a website that monitors companies offering forex brokerage services, has ranked OctaFX at 59, which means investment with this company is highly risky because it is neither a publicly traded entity nor operating through a bank. The company engaging in deceptive marketing through social media to lure people into making investments with it without any protection or regulatory oversight.

Market analysts claim that offshore companies make huge investment in their online marketing to attract customers by violating the rules and regulations. They are of the opinion that the concerned government authorities must probe the unlawful business activities of such companies to protect people from financial scams.

A prominent citizen, Dr Adnan Jabbar recently filed a complaint with the Pakistan Citizen Portal about the OctaFX business activities and to determine its legal status in the country. The Pakistan Citizen Portal forwarded this complaint to the SECP, which checked its record and informed Dr Adnan that OctaFX was not registered with the SECP.

The Commission further told the complainant that State Bank of Pakistan is responsible for monitoring and taking action against companies involved in trading of foreign currencies. The SECP, nonetheless, stated that the complaint was being forwarded to the State Bank of Pakistan for further action.

Therefore, Dr Adnan has urged Pakistanis not to make investment with an offshore company that was not registered in the country. OctaFX is operating since 2011 and since then no one bothered to register company in Pakistan to make its business activities lawful. The company has maintained its strong online presence through its website and Facebook page.

OctaFX website offers information in seven languages, including Urdu. However, the company had not mentioned location of its office address in Islamabad and just mentioned a WhatsApp number and G-11 Sector without giving proper address of its office.

OctaFX is making contact with its customers through online system. In case of any problem or complaint, company's customers have no other choice but to seek help from customers care department of the company. As the company is not registered in Pakistan, India and some other countries, its customers are in no position to get help from the government regulators to solve their grievances against the company.

In fact, expansion in modern technology globally has made it easy for many offshore companies to target customers in countries like Pakistan through false projection and deceptive online marketing. In recent years many overseas companies have started attracting investment from Pakistan and other countries in which a majority of investors have lost their money.

Some Indian investors of OctaFX have similarly raised fraudulent practices of the

company. Ayisha Rajasekhar has been deprived of more than USD 74,000 by the company. In March 2020, Ayisha made a profit of USD 74,000 through foreign currencies trade with this company. She tried to withdraw profit in two separate attempts, but she was still waiting to receive the money as officials of the company were using one or the other excuse to justify the delay in withdrawal of money.

OctaFX only returned original deposit of USD 600 to Ayisha, but never paid her profit involving more than USD 74,000. She has maintained record of her chat with the company, messages she received and account information as well. Ayisha has urged the Forex Peace Army to look into this fraud of the company and support her to receive the profit that she earned through trade with the company.

Meanwhile, Rajiv too has experienced his bitter experience of trade with the company. Rajiv said when he started earning profit, behavior of officials of company changed and they started creating technical problems for him. Rajiv has also maintained record of trade through platform of the company.

Furthermore, Dilip Sagar, an Indian investor, also shares his bitter experience with OctaFX. Dilip invested USD 2,000 with the company and when his investment increased to USD 3,300 in just a few days trading, he tried to withdraw the amount. Nonetheless, for the past more than eight months he has been waiting for completion of his withdrawal request.

Dilip is contacting customer care of the company regularly, but he is getting the same reply that bank's system is delaying approval of withdrawal request. As the company is not registered in India, Dilip is unable to seek regulators help to get back his money.

Similarly, Hammad Ahmed also invested about USD 3,300 with this company and he earned a significant profit in few months. Problem began with Hammad when he tried to withdraw some money from his account with the company.

OctaFX is also cheating in execution of trading of currencies according to price suggested by the customers. For example, this is how the company responded to

Debashish Behera's queries: "Your orders were closed by a take profit but due to limited liquidity available at that moment on the market it was executed at the different price.

"It may happen when the market is volatile and there is a limited amount of available liquidity to execute clients' orders. Note that GBP pairs (e.g. GBPUSD) may still be affected by Parliamentary Elections in the UK resulting the market to be volatile and unstable. In such situations we cannot guarantee that your pending order, take profit or stop loss will be filled at the requested rate.

"Whether a particular order will be filled at a more or less advantageous price depends solely on the market situation. OctaFX serves as an intermediary between the client and the market by offsetting the orders one for one with the best prices from our liquidity providers to be executed at their end.

"Bear in mind that from our side, it is not possible to 100% guarantee that your orders will be filled at the requested rate due to a nature of ECN trading."

Recently, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani expressed serious concern over illegal business of offshore companies in Pakistan. He has asked the State Bank, FIA, SECP, and PTA to monitor activities of fraudulent illegal overseas companies and take appropriate action against them including removal of their apps from Google Play Store. Chairman Senate has also sought a report from these institutions about murky business of unregistered offshore companies in Pakistan.

In this situation, the SECP, State Bank of Pakistan and FIA must set-up a joint cell to monitor illegal business activities of offshore companies and try to protect people from any financial scam. Issuing warning through their websites or press releases is not enough to deter the offshore fraudulent companies.

The need of the hour, therefore, is for a practical mechanism to be evolved to discourage such deceptive business practices that can potentially deprive people of their money in the name of investment and trade of foreign currencies and international stock markets shares.

Govt Achieves “Mission Impossible” As External Economy Shows Signs of Improvement

Roshan Digital Account becomes a success story: Surplus current account, rising forex reserves, depreciation of dollar and record remittances indicate strong signs of economic recovery in 2021.

By Javed Mahmood

Some initiatives of the PTI government have played a vital role in attracting more remittances, stabilizing foreign exchange reserves, and eliminating the current account deficit that seemed to be an impossible task when the PTI took reigns of the country in August 2018. In less than a year period, the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) system has attracted more than USD 1 billion in remittances from the overseas Pakistanis.

The government introduced the well-planned Roshan Digital Account in Sept 2020 with the aim to offer online access to overseas (non-resident) Pakistanis to banking services in the country from anywhere in the world and send foreign exchange to their family members and friends with convenience. By April 2021, this system has mopped up more than one billion dollars' worth remittances.

In the past, the facility for overseas Pakistanis to use banking channels to transfer money to their motherland was ignored. Nonetheless, PTI government launched the RDA initiative a year ago which not only made it easy for expatriates to avail banking facilities to transfer money to Pakistan, but it also increased remittances and strengthened the foreign exchange reserves in 2021.

By May 7, 2021, the foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan have further improved to USD 22.91 billion, of which USD 15.774 billion are with the State Bank of Pakistan while domestic banks hold USD 7.13 billion. These forex reserves are at the highest level since August 2018, when PTI came to power while entire reserves at that time amounted to USD 14 billion. In other words, the proactive policy initiatives of the PTI government have raised foreign exchange reserves by more than USD 6.9 billion by May 2021.

To further promote the Roshan Digital Account system in collaboration with the



domestic banks and car makers, the State Bank of Pakistan has provided an opportunity to non-resident Pakistanis to buy cars through bank financing for their family members in Pakistan at lowest mark-up. Expatriates can also make full payment of car through their accounts.

Additionally, overseas Pakistanis have also been allowed to send donations through their Roshan Digital Accounts to promote philanthropy in Pakistan. Since 2020, more than 125,000 expatriates have opened their bank accounts and are sending foreign exchange to their family members and relatives regularly and this number of account holders is constantly growing.

Record Remittances Expected in FY2020-21

In financial year 2020-21, Pakistan is set to receive a record USD 29 billion in remittances from expatriates against inflows of USD 23.2 billion in FY2019-20. Thus, in fiscal year 2020-21, Pakistan is set to receive USD 6 billion more in remittances over 2019-20. Interestingly, in 10 months of the ongoing fiscal year (July 2020 to April 2021), remittances have already exceeded USD 24.2 billion with monthly average at USD 2.42 billion, higher than remittance received over the whole financial year 2019-20.

In April 2021, Pakistan has witnessed a record 56 percent single-month growth in remittances, which amounted to USD 2.8 billion for the first time. Roshan Digital Account mechanism encouraged expatriates to send home this record amount of foreign exchange in April ahead of Eid-ul-Fitr.

In the remaining two months of FY2020-21 (May and June), Pakistan is expected to receive another USD 4.5 billion to USD 5 billion remittances. Consequently, during July 2020 to June 2021, remittance are projected to hover around USD 29 billion for the first time. Notably, the volume of remittances is much higher than our national exports in this fiscal year.

Steady growth in remittance has not only stabilized the country's foreign exchange reserves, but also improved rupee value against dollar while the current account balance too has become surplus. In April 2021, the dollar exchange rate has plummeted to PKR 150 in interbank from the record high PKR 168 a few months ago.

Current Account Balance Turns Positive

Another positive financial development is the current account surplus in 9 months of FY2020-21, which amounted to USD 959

million during July-March period against USD 4.147 billion deficit in the corresponding period of FY2019-20. PTI government inherited a huge amount of current account deficit when it came to power in August 2018. For example, in FY19, the current account deficit rose to USD 13.43 billion.

Nevertheless, the government enforced a number of initiatives, including systematic cut in unnecessary imports and increase in customs tariffs, which reduced the quantum of current account deficit to USD 4.44 billion in FY20. However, in 2020-21, the current account balance showed surplus with USD 959 million during July-March period. To curb the monster of current account deficit, the government, on the one hand, enhanced remittances in the ongoing financial year while on the other reduced imports.

For example, in 2017-18, country's imports expanded to USD 60.8 billion against just USD 23.21 billion exports, resultantly, Pakistan faced USD 37.59 billion trade deficit. In other words, this trade deficit technically devoured the entire inflows of remittances and a major proportion of exports as well.

However, in 2018-19 and 2019-20, the government slashed imports to USD 54.76 billion and USD 44.55 billion, respectively. Thus, in just two years, imports' quantum plummeted from USD 60.8 billion to USD 44.55 billion which played an inevitable role in improving the balance of payment position of Pakistan. By reducing imports in two years, the government has saved a huge amount of foreign exchange worth USD USD 16 billion.

However, the size of trade deficit in 2019-20, at USD 23.15 billion, was still

very high and unbearable for a debt-trapped country which needed to be further narrowed down to the lowest possible level to further improve balance of payment position and ensure economic stability in the country.

To achieve this goal, the Government must explore avenues to enhance national exports which are consistently falling since 2013-14, when, for the first time, exports crossed USD 25 billion mark. However, from 2014-15 to 2020, Pakistan's exports have dithered steadily and fell to USD 21.4 billion in FY2020.

In last two years, COVID-19 pandemic has affected Pakistan's capacity to enhance exports because of lockdowns and dwindling demand in international markets. Nonetheless, as coronavirus is subsiding gradually, efforts should be put in place to capture more share of exports in the years ahead.

Foreign Financing in 2020-21

In first eight months of the fiscal year 2020-21, Pakistan has received USD 7.2 billion financial assistance from external institutions such as the World Bank, Asian Development, and IMF. During this period, the government repaid USD 4.1 billion foreign loans.

From July-Feb FY21, the Asian Development Bank provided USD 1.2 billion to Pakistan while the World Bank gave USD 909 million. Additionally, the IMF also provided USD 500 million in 2021. Also, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) has deferred its USD 2 billion loan Pakistan was supposed to return in 2020-21. Thus, foreign financing has also supported the

balance of payment position, rupee-dollar exchange rate and played an essential role in turning current account surplus.

In view of the present scenario, financial sector analysts believe that the economy of Pakistan is showing encouraging signs on the external front in 2020-21. If this trend continues in next financial year (2021-22), Pakistan will see further improvement in its key economic indicators along with growth in foreign and domestic investment, gross domestic product (GDP), and further stability in the rupee-dollar parity.

Economic Risk Factors

Arif Habib Limited has pointed out some risk factors such as 30 percent decline in inflows of foreign investment in first eight months of FY21. During this period, Pakistan has received only USD 1.3 billion in foreign investment. Similarly, the country's exports are also shrinking amid the ongoing pandemic and increasing competitiveness in international markets.

Depreciation of dollar would erode the competitiveness of Pakistan's exports in the prevailing scenario in the international markets. It is a fact that the inflows of foreign exchange in the shape of remittances, foreign investment, exports, external assistance are vulnerable to unforeseen developments at international level.

The Roshan Digital Account initiative has proved a successful strategy but the government should also focus on enhancing exports, making them competitive, and evolving further strategies to attract more remittances, foreign investment, and external assistance as well to sustain current account surplus and to bolster economic growth in the country in 2021-22.

Budget Set to Bring Economic Stimulus

Building on the healthy growth projected for the current fiscal, Tarin and his mandarins aim to bring relief to the common citizen and more growth to business.



By **Khalique Ahmad**

No major surprises are anticipated from Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin when he rises to present Federal Budget 2021-22 in the National Assembly on 11 June 2021. The government, particularly, the Finance Minister, has already promised a growth-oriented and business-friendly budget for 2021-22 and to bring relief to the common citizen.

The final shape of the relief-cum-growth would, however, depend on outcome of the authorities' discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which had set hard conditions while reviving the USD 6 billion programme after a gap of over a year of virtual suspension.

The Finance Minister has also promised to increase revenue collection by using both the carrot and the stick by encouraging self-assessment and giving incentives to businesses but at the same time – through audits, use of technology and other innovative means – hunt down and put behind bars those found evading taxes.

Under the revised Budget Strategy Paper, the government is eying a tax target of about PKR 5.8 trillion, a 20 percent increase from the just over PKR 4.7 trillion collection anticipated by the end of the current fiscal year. The target for the next year appears significantly lower than the PKR 5.96 trillion committed with the IMF in February-March this year. The IMF is unlikely to make a big issue for about PKR 160 billion lower revenue target and that too in a Covid-19 year.

The authorities expect this relaxation on the basis of the emergence of the ongoing third wave of the Coronavirus outbreak. As well, they expect the Fund to understand the need for a stimulus to put the economy in high-growth mode.

Priming the pump is in order at this point to help create more jobs, cut back poverty, and boost revenues. It is also warranted in light of the robust 3.94 percent GDP growth the economy is heading for this year based on revised projections.

As such, the government is expected to propose close to PKR 2 trillion worth of public sector development spending including PKR 900 billion under the federal development programme to meet a growth rate target of 5.2 percent, up from the earlier commitment of about PKR 800 billion when the government was aiming for a 4.2 percent growth rate.

The revision is also due because growth target for next year were to be based on current year's growth rate, coming in at a healthy 3.94 percent no compared with the earlier projection of no more than 3 percent against all expectations. The bar, therefore, has to be logically increased by at least the same 1.2 percent increase in GDP growth rate from about 4 percent to 5.2 percent.

With about 5.2 percent GDP growth and 8 percent targeted inflation next year, the revenue is expected to automatically jump by almost 13.2 percent, leaving a gap of about 7 percent higher revenue (about PKR 350 billion) to be filled through additional

measures. About PKR 80-90 billion worth of revenue measures have already been introduced through a presidential ordinance for income tax exemptions that would be protected through the Finance Bill 2021-22.

That means the government would practically require no more than PKR 250 billion worth of additional tax measures – easily achievable from traders and other minor adjustments here and there including data-driven enforcement measures.

In the words of finance minister Tarin, “Revenue, revenue and revenue is the next year’s priority to be achieved through innovation by making good use of technology and bring those people into the tax net who are not paying taxes and incentivise traders to pay the Sales Tax as has been done in Turkey and Columbia”.

This would be done through a mix of administrative changes and incentive in the form of lower tax rates for those who electronically integrate with the tax database. Awareness-raising about how tax-integrated points of sales can help enhance a trader’s sales is also envisaged.

One of the key initiatives in the coming budget will be the expansion in the definition and scope of top-tier retailers to expand the tax base. The integration of about 50,000 points of sales of retail traders with debit and credit cards and the change in definition is estimated to have an additional revenue impact of almost PKR 70 billion in the first year. A key idea is to factor hard data points like electricity and gas consumption and the shop floor area into taxation criteria.

The salaries for the government employees and pensioners would be increased by no more than 10 percent – just above the 8 percent rate of inflation – which may be taken to 15 percent given the public pressure as the salaries were kept unchanged last year for every segment on top of a freeze on salaries of senior civil and armed forces officers a year earlier. This would be in addition to the recently introduced 25 percent disparity reduction allowance.

It is in this background that government has told the IMF that it would not be possible politically to make major adjustments in

income tax rates for the salaried class except for a few high earners and that too in the private sector to raise about PKR 8-10 billion in additional revenue. This is because the real wages have actually went down since the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) came to power three years ago due to the heavy toll inflation has taken on the earnings of the salaried class.

On the other hand, the government plans to increase revenue collection target from petroleum levy to PKR 700 billion next year against the current year’s targeted PKR 450 billion. Coupled with similar streams from State Bank of Pakistan profits, the overall non-tax revenues are proposed to be enhanced to over PKR 2 trillion.



The government has committed to continue the existing policy of imposition of levy, cess and surcharges to enhance the overall resources for the federation to finance rising debt servicing costs. In order to introduce new non-tax revenue streams, a comprehensive revision of existing legal frameworks are under consultation with the relevant ministries for necessary amendments in the enabling laws, rules, and regulations.

On the demand of big businesses, the government is expected to lower the minimum turnover tax from existing 1.5 percent to about 0.5 percent.

An almost complete freeze is expected on current expenditures, except on account of salary increases, to contain the budget

deficit at 6.5 percent of GDP instead of the earlier commitment of 6 percent with the IMF. Interest payments over the next fiscal are expected to be over PKR 3.1 trillion.

The budget proposal is expected to seek elimination of some 15 withholding taxes as authorities contend that – collected mostly in the sales tax mode and incorrectly credited under direct tax collections – withholding taxes are not only highly inflationary but also put a higher burden on the poor rather than the rich. Also, the revenue impact from this measure will be minimal and likely to be offset by the savings in man-hours and institutional resources tied to collection.

The government has already announced to reduce the number of withholding taxes from the current 65 to 25 or 30 in the medium term. The coming budget year would mark the beginning of this process.

The defence allocations would generally remain unchanged at about PKR 1.35 trillion against the current year’s actual spending of about PKR 1.3 trillion while running of civil government would also see a similar nominal increase of about PKR 15-20 billion from current year’s PKR 500 billion. Major allocations would be announced for agriculture, water sector, and the completion of ongoing development projects.

(The writer is an Islamabad based journalist)

Food Security is National Security, says PM's Agri Czar

Our farm sector is plagued by problems accumulated over seventy years of neglect and incompetence, says Jamshed Iqbal Cheema.

By Palwasha Khattak

There is nothing more important than agriculture for our country, says Jamshed Iqbal Cheema, the Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Food Security, who believes food security is integral to national security. A stalwart of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) from Lahore, Cheema is said to be an expert in food security and agricultural sciences. He was appointed by Prime Minister Imran Khan as the SAPM on Food Security this April.

The Truth International (TTI) interviewed Mr Cheema to find out his take on the nation's food security situation and the government plans to improve the farm sector. Given below is an abridged transcript of the conversation.

TTI: What is the importance of agriculture in our economy? Are you satisfied with the attention given to the agriculture sector by the governments in the past?

JIC: We are amongst the most populous countries in the world with a population of 220 million. The world produces around 780 million tons of wheat and 500 million tons of rice every year but only 9 percent of either commodity figures in international trade. Global maize production stands at around 1,100 million tons, but only 15 to 17 percent of it crosses international borders. Likewise, less than 10 percent of the global vegetable production is traded internationally.

This shows that farm produce is largely consumed within the countries where they are produced. A country's food security is its integral to national security. Majority of the countries strive for independence in food production. For Pakistan, agriculture is the lifeline in the absence of other big exports. Our farm sector feeds the 220 million Pakistanis and is a source of employment for 43 percent of the country's population. Industry's raw material is produced here, and more than 60 percent of the country's total income is generated. There is nothing more important than agriculture for our country.



TTI correspondent interviews Jamshed Iqbal Cheema SAPM on Food Security

TTI: PM Imran Khan, time and again has said that his government is focusing on agriculture transformation for targeted sectors. What is this transformation plan and which specific sectors are being targeted?

JIC: We can call this agriculture transformation plan a backward calculation. This is the first-ever wholesome plan for agriculture. Dietary requirements of 220 million population needs to be met with food, feed and fiber and this plan addresses that requirement thoroughly.

For sustainable agriculture, we require irrigation and unfortunately, we have been wasting the water for centuries. Finally, after 40 years, two dams are under construction as part of the transformation plan. For Punjab government only, a PKR 220-billion project is underway for lining of canals. Furthermore, we are working on genetic improvement in livestock.

TTI: The government has launched Kisan Card. When will it be implemented all over the country, and how will a local Kisan benefit from it?

JIC: The Kisan Card project will be implemented by December this year. This project will help end human interaction since the instrument provided to the farmer will help him receive his subsidy directly. Less human interaction means less chances of discrepancy. Farmers will receive all kinds of government support through the Kisan Cards.

TTI: You agree that despite the fact that 60 percent Pakistanis' income is attached with the agriculture sector, it remains the most neglected sector. What has this government planned to improve yield of different crops and lift this sector up to the international standards?

JIC: I believe there is no international standard because the production is dependent on the suitability of weather. A damp climate like coastal areas suits the production of sugarcane. Wheat is cultivated once a year in many countries due to its climate and in Pakistan, it's cultivated twice a year. I believe we are doing well in crop production but we surely lack in livestock due to the inefficient system. We are planning to double the production of crops in Pakistan.

TTI: Are you satisfied with the performance of agriculture research institutions in Pakistan? How can you make these institutions to work for the improvement of agriculture sector?

JIC: Pakistan has 200 kg grains available per capita as compared to the global average of 360 kg. Pakistan's average per person calorie intake is 2,100 compared with the world's 2,900. This shows that we are consuming 30 to 40 percent less than the world, which clearly means undernourishment. The production is far less than the demand in Pakistan be it grains, vegetables, fruits, meat, or pulses. However, sugar and ghee are fulfilling the demand. The farmer's income is low even though the final product is sold at an exorbitant price.

This inefficient system is victimizing the grower and the buyer equally leaving no room for growth and prosperity. Therefore, we are extremely dissatisfied and worried for the system, which didn't come in place in a day but is attributable to the incompetency of the past 70 years. Even then, if you ask the previous governments, they exaggerate their government's performance in agriculture despite the low calories intake of more than 40 percent to 50 percent population which means that this population does not have enough calories and energy to function normally.

This implies that half of the population is hungry. How can a person [suffering from hunger] function physically and mentally? A study says that if a child does not get enough food for the first 45 months since conception, that child contributes 56 percent less in GDP. I believe, therefore, we are producing underperforming individuals.

TTI: Most farmers are not aware of modern techniques, to use high quality seeds, and other modern farming practices. How do you plan to disseminate this knowledge?

JIC: We will be providing two types of services; agriculture extension and livestock extension. Their representatives are available at Union Council level who will be mobilized. Parallel to these extension, another extension will be introduced that will be managed by the private sector, working on given targets to avoid inefficiency. These extension services will

basically work on knowledge dissemination. They will be properly guided on international standards to provide training to farmers. One trained technical resource person with veterinary or agriculture degree will be allocated to three Union Councils.

TTI: Farmers are not getting a fair price of their produce. The middleman is minting money at the expense of the farmer. How can you reduce the role of the intermediary in this sector?

JIC: We can never reduce the role of the middleman without an alternative. Without a doubt, he is surviving due to the need of his genuine role. Now we are providing the alternative through commodity exchange technology via stores on the Chowks of villages and small towns. We are focusing on people getting employment opportunities in their villages instead of moving to cities in search of livelihood. We will ensure well-constructed roads, better health and educational facilities in rural areas. As you can witness, we are making universities in villages and industries too now so that people don't have to migrate to cities for education or employment.

TTI: The PM has spoken many times about how friendly our climate is for olive cultivation. What is the government doing to promote olive cultivation in Pakistan?

JIC: We have three to four divisions basically including Pindi and Hazara division along with semi hilly areas that are well suited for olive cultivation. However, the areas more suitable for olive cultivation lack the culture of agriculture, therefore we are taking necessary steps to promote agriculture there. This is a mega project where we will test every suitable land available for olive cultivation along with the availability of water and other resources.

TTI: Livestock is part and parcel of agriculture sector. What is the government doing for the promotion of animal husbandry and breeding, especially genetic improvement of cattle?

JIC: At the moment, livestock has become a bigger sector than crop and is contributing

at 60 percent more share. Pakistan has 90 million animals. Some 49 million cows give 4 liter milk per day whereas the American cow gives 36 liter and Australian cow give 26 liter milk per day. Out of these, only 181 cows, which are considered elite breed of Sahiwal, gives 2,800 liter milk as compared to the 11,000 liter of American cow and 7,000 liter of Australian cow.

Some 30 million Pakistanis are dependent on this production and they need the government's support for growth. As per PM Khan's plan, the poor farmer will be supported first in terms of breed improvement and genetic material. We are bringing a 40 Arab rupees project in which we will bring exotic female semen within three years in low price. In this project, the cow will only give birth to female calf which will help her grow the herd rapidly.

We believe that this will increase milk production from 4 to 9 liters per day. Our target is tripling milk production in 7 years, taking output from 60 billion to 180 billion liter while decreasing the number of animals and increasing the amount of milk production. We are also working on a separate project for local breed on institutional level by improving the breed with the help of exotic material.

TTI: Pakistan has a long coastline. What is the government's plan to improve fisheries in the country?

JIC: On coastal areas, we will work on fisheries and shrimp along with palm trees. If we grow 1.8 million palm trees in Pakistan, our requirement for edible oil will be completed. The main components of a balanced diet of human body consists of 60 percent carbohydrates, 30 percent fats and 10 percent protein which means fat is one third component for human beings and is very important.

Our coastline is 1050 km long and we plan to make use of that with irrigation to grow palm trees. Talks are underway with Baluchistan government and Sindh government considering the weather suitability and water availability to grow 1.7 million trees on the coastline, which will fulfill our requirement. Since there is an increase in the requirement, it will increase to 3 million trees over time.

Taliban May Bring Their Own Peace Plan to Istanbul

While the Afghan Taliban have embraced the Istanbul process after Pakistani suasion, they see their complete control of the country as the only road to Peace.



By Tahir Khan

The Afghan Taliban are likely to bring their own peace plan to the proposed Istanbul Conference, but they see their complete control of Afghanistan as a necessary prerequisite to peace in the war-ravaged country, The Truth International (TTI) can report based on public and private discussions with key Taliban representatives and Pakistani government officials over the last two weeks.

An influential Afghan Taliban leader has said war will end only when the Taliban capture the 30 percent areas in Afghanistan currently not under their control. The Taliban currently “control 70 percent areas” of Afghanistan, Ameer Khan Mutaqi claimed in an audio message, asserting the remaining 30 percent will also be “freed”.

“This is the best reconciliation and this is a major progress that there is peace in the 70 percent areas in Afghanistan”, the Afghan Taliban leader said in an audio message released by the Taliban on 23 May 2021. “People are asking us for a ceasefire but [our priority is to] try to end the war.

“When [the Afghan government forces] give up resistance and we have liberated the remaining areas, there will be complete peace. The remaining areas will be gradually liberated and we will try to gather all Afghans on one platform and put an end to the years of sufferings”.

Mutaqi was the Information Minister during the Taliban rule. He also served as the secretary at the office of the Taliban chief and currently leads the “Dawat-ul-Irshad” (preaching and guidance) that deals with the affairs of those security personnel and government officials who join the Taliban.

Mutaqi’s comments strengthen the notion that the Taliban are trying to forcibly control Afghanistan at a time when the United States and its NATO allies are looking to complete withdrawal of troops by 11 September this year, to coincide with the 20th anniversary of the 9/11 attacks in New York and Washington.

Taliban on warpath

Based on my interaction with several Taliban leaders this April, I believe they are in no mood to stop fighting unless President Ashraf Ghani agrees to step down and a new government acceptable to the Taliban replaces the current political dispensation.

The Taliban have rejected repeated calls for a ceasefire and resumed operations after the end of a three-day Eid truce. Taliban fighters have continued their offensives across the country and are trying to capture more areas to further strengthen their position on the negotiation table. They recently took control of more districts in Baghlan, Maidan-e-Wardak, and Logar. The other week, they launched an offensive on the capital of Laghman province.

The Taliban political representatives have been ceased with consultations with the top leadership and senior members of the powerful leadership council to chalk out a future strategy and make decisions on the Istanbul

conference, intra-Afghan negotiations, and a ceasefire.

A senior Taliban leader, who was aware of the internal discussions, told TTI last week there was no decision on the ceasefire. However, the participants agreed to participate in the Istanbul conference with certain conditions.

Intra-Afghan talks

Intra-Afghan negotiations in Qatar have entered into their nine month now without any tangible progress as the two sides are yet to agree on an agenda for dialogue. The Taliban and the Afghan government negotiators met on the second day of Eid after a stalemate to mull ways to expedite the process.

Taliban demand for a new set up in Kabul and the government's offer to the insurgents to join the present set up under Mr Ghani is the major hurdle in the negotiations.

"Joining the Kabul administration means a surrender. We have not waged Jihad for 20 years to surrender to the Kabul administration or get a few ministries or positions. We want an Islamic government that was mentioned in the Doha agreement," a Taliban negotiator told The Truth International the other week.

In another development, Pakistan has stepped up efforts to push the peace process forward. Pakistan sent a team of security officials to Qatar in the last week of April to meet with the Taliban to discuss the peace process.

A Taliban negotiator said the Pakistani delegation secured the Taliban consent to participate in the Istanbul conference by saying they could present their own roadmap to peace at the conclave. Afghan President Ashraf Ghani and Dr Abdullah Abdullah, the Chairman of the reconciliation council, have already prepared their plans to present the Istanbul meeting.

"We are close to the start of meaningful Intra Afghan Negotiations," a Pakistani official, involved in the Afghan affairs, told TTI.

Fresh Kabul-Islamabad tensions

A new tiff between the neighbours reared its head recently after Pakistan deemed as ungracious public remarks about Islamabad from top Kabul leaders.

Pakistani officials say they were surprised over statements by President Ashraf Ghani and Afghan National Security Advisor Hamdullah Mohib against Pakistan just two days after the visit of Pakistan's army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa to Kabul along with the UK defence chief.

Officials aware of Gen Bajwa's meetings in Kabul insisted that the meeting between the Pakistani army chief and Mr Ghani was held in a very cordial atmosphere and no contentious issues cropped up during the discussions.

General Bajwa travelled to Kabul to show solidarity with the Afghan leaders following violent incidents and a deadly attack in the Shiite-majority Dasht-e-Barchi area of

capital Kabul which killed nearly 90 people and injured many more.

A Pakistani official said Ghani offered anti-Pakistan remarks as he was expecting support of Pakistan for his peace plan with the Taliban. No country has yet announced support to any peace plan but it has been a long-standing stance of Pakistan that it would support every decision to be taken by Afghans about the future.

The UK defence chief is making efforts for trust building between Pakistan and Afghanistan with the support of the US that can lead to signing of a security pact between the two uneasy neighbours. Pakistan has informed the UK and other friendly countries about the Afghan leaders' accusations, according to a Pakistani official.

Trust is a must for bilateral cooperation in general and to enable Pakistan to play a role in the peace process in particular. Islamabad and Kabul have several bilateral mechanisms to address each other's concerns and such forums should be used for discussions rather than going to the media.

There is a principle in the Afghanistan-Pakistan Action Plan for Peace and Solidarity (APAPPS) that both countries will avoid the blame game. APAPPS has two groups of the military and intelligence officials who can focus on security-related issues.

The two parties also formed two groups of security officials after Prime Minister Imran Khan's visit to Kabul in November last year for discussions on security issues and the peace process.



Is Russia Nudging Pakistan and India to Play Ball?

It seems Moscow is quietly encouraging the South Asian nuclear rivals to bury the Cold War-era hatchet and look to the future.



By Umer Farooq

Twice in the last three years, Pakistani military leadership has exerted itself to offer an olive branch to arch-rival India just before starting negotiations with Russian authorities to acquire state-of-the-art weapons systems.

First, army chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa uncharacteristically offered India peace talks for the normalization of relations just ahead of embarking on a visit to Moscow on 24 April 2018 to discuss what has been described in Russian and Pakistani media statements as “enhanced military cooperation” between the two countries.

Again, Gen Bajwa extended public assurance to New Delhi Islamabad had no “hostile intention” against any country in the region just ahead of Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov’s visit to discuss close defence and military cooperation between the two countries.

This seems to be requirement of the circumstances under which Russian military-industrial complex will have to seek the approval of their political masters for the sale of the most modern fighter aircraft in Russian inventory, SU-35, for the purchase of which Pakistan Air Force have shown interest.

Former Air Force Chief of Pakistan, Air

Marshall Sohail Amman travelled to Moscow in July 2016 specifically to negotiate with Russian military officials the sale of modern military hardware. In August 2018, several SU-35 were flown into Pakistan by Russian pilots for trials, indicating that the negotiations for the delivery of an unspecified numbers of this state-of-the-art weapons system were still on between the Russian Federation’s military-industrial complex and the Pakistani military.

This contradicted the early assertions by Russian Defence officials that no such talks were underway for the delivery of SU-35 to Pakistan that can decisively change the balance of military power in the sub-continent.

A report in Russian publication Sputnik quoted Russian Foreign Ministry’s director of the Second Asian Department, Zamir Kabulov as saying, “Moscow is not engaged in negotiations on Su-35 fighter jet supplies to Islamabad despite the announcement by Pakistan of possible deliveries.”

Earlier, the Pakistani ambassador to Russia told Sputnik that Chief of Air Staff of the Pakistan Air Force Sohail Aman had “fruitful talks” in Moscow in July on the purchase of Russian Su-35.

The Su-35 is a long-range, multirole, twin-engine warplane that experts say can help Pakistan have a significant and potent presence in the Arabian Sea region, something the aging Mirage fleet is ill-equipped to achieve even when augmented by the indigenously produced JF-17 Thunder which has limited range in comparison.

“Given the changing geo-politics and the Chinese investment with a trade terminus is Gwadar, there definitely is a need for a long-range fighter” said a former Air Force pilot on condition of anonymity.

India has been intensely lobbying with Moscow not to sell advanced weapons systems like Su-35 to Pakistani Air Force which can alter the balance of military power in South Asia. Within weeks of Pakistan Air Force chief’s visit to Moscow where he held talks with Russian military officials for the sale of Su-35, an Indian delegation led by a senior security official also visited Moscow to lobby with Russian officials.

In the wake of this visit, the Russian media churned out reports contradicting Pakistani claims that they have been negotiating in Moscow for the sale of Su-35.

The Russian Federation has ongoing lucrative defence deals with its Cold War ally India, and political and bilateral military relations are very strong. However, the Russian military industrial complex is looking at Pakistan as a potential large buyer for its military hardware. If it goes through, the Su-35 deal could be largest arm supply deal with Pakistan – Russia's Cold War opponent.

Russia lifted its long-standing unilateral embargo on weapons deliveries to Pakistan in June 2014. Sergei Chemezov, the head of the state-owned Rostec corporation, announced the decision in Moscow. Chemezov further confirmed that Russia and Pakistan are negotiating the sale of Mi-35 Hind attack helicopters.

Later in September 2015, Sputnik quoted Deputy Foreign Minister Sergei Ryabkov as saying both sides were negotiating for the delivery of an unspecified number of Su-35 jets alongside the sale of Mi-35M Hind E helicopter gunships that has recently been agreed upon. This statement, however, was later contradicted by Russian defence official in public statements saying no negotiations were ongoing in this regards.

Russian media has been writing commentaries and analysis to describe the sale of Su-35 fighter aircraft to Pakistan as a sensitive issue as this would amount to selling to an erstwhile rival a weapon system more advanced than the Russian aircraft Indian air force – Cold War ally and still a close friend – was using.

Pakistan, nevertheless, started receiving Russian weapons in August 2017 when four Mi-35 attack helicopters were handed over to Pakistan Army Aviation. Islamabad and Moscow concluded the USD 153 million helicopter deal during then-Chief of Army Staff (COAS) Gen Raheel Sharif's visit to Russia in June 2016.

Did Su-35 negotiations revive after Gen Bajwa's Moscow visit in April 2018?

On 24 April 2018, General Qamar Javed Bajwa visited Moscow for talks for close military and defence cooperation between Pakistan and the Russian Federation. Two weeks before he left for Moscow, he held out an olive branch to India while addressing the passing out parade at Pakistan's Military Academy Kakul on 14 April 2018.

The general's remarks came as a bit of a surprise to political observers in Islamabad. Given the fact that it was full-fledged policy statement meant to offer peace talks to arch-rival India, it should have come from the civil authorities.

Pakistan needs advanced Russian military hardware to deal with the difficult task of stabilizing its western border in the face of religious extremism and militancy. Gen Bajwa's predecessor had signed an agreement with the Russian Federation in October 2015, which allowed arms trade and weapons development cooperation between the two countries.

But Pakistan was having a problem convincing the Russian military-industrial complex to sell the requisite military hardware in the face of intense Indian lobbying in the power corridors of Moscow against this backdrop. Gen Bajwa's speech in Abbottabad was meant to convey to his Russian interlocutors Pakistan was ready to reduce political and military tensions with India before he embarked on a visit to Moscow.

It is no secret that Pakistani diplomats who regularly interact with Russian government officials were being politely told to normalise relations with India before Russia could play ball on closer military cooperation.

Pakistan and Russian have been engaged in joint military exercises since 2014 – the year Russian and Chinese military showed interests in the combat experience Pakistani land forces have acquired in the fight against terrorists and militants. Both China and Russian Federation have shown interests in learning from Pakistani experience as they have to combat similar militant movement in their own lands.

Foreign Minister Lavrov said Russia was ready to build further counterterrorism potential through provision of military equipment to Pakistan. "This is in the interest of all states of the region," he said, adding that both sides also agreed on joint military exercises and drills.

In an obvious reference to India, the official press release quoted Gen Bajwa as telling the Russian foreign minister Pakistan had no hostile designs towards any country and

was committed to working towards a cooperative regional framework based on sovereign equality and mutual respect.

Russian political and military leadership has a strategic interests in ensuring that Pakistan military have enough space to focus on terrorism and militancy in its North-West and in Afghanistan and not waste its sources on conflict with India.

For this Moscow is pushing for closer defence and intelligence cooperation with Pakistan. In this connection, Pakistan hosted in July 2018 a meeting of Intelligence chiefs of Russia, China, and Iran to discuss the rising threat of ISIS on Afghanistan's territory.

The meeting was first reported by Russia's TASS new agency. The report said the intelligence chiefs took stock of the rise of ISIS on Afghan territory.

"Heads of intelligence services of Russia, Iran, China, and Pakistan held a meeting in Islamabad on Tuesday to discuss the measures against the threat of aggregation of the Islamic State militants in Afghanistan", Sergei Ivanov, the chief of the Russian Foreign Intelligence Service's press bureau reportedly told TASS.

"The discussions focused on the dangers arising from a build-up of the Islamic State on the Afghan territory," TASS reported. The conference reached understanding of the importance of coordinated steps to prevent the trickling of IS terrorists from Syria and Iraq to Afghanistan where from they would pose risks for neighbouring countries.

Russian diplomacy has a history of making efforts to normalize relations between Pakistan and India. After the 1965 war the cease-fire between the militaries of Pakistan and India was mediated through the good offices of Russian diplomats.

The agreement was mediated by Soviet premier Aleksey Kosygin, who had invited Pakistani President General Ayub Khan and Indian Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri to Tashkent. The parties agreed to withdraw all armed forces to positions held before 5 August 1965, to restore diplomatic relations, and to discuss economic, refugee, and other questions.

The Inimitable Farooq Qaiser Is No More

The attempted land grab by Bahria Town Karachi has the fingerprints of political patronage all over it.

By Kokub Jehan

His pioneering work as a master puppeteer for Pakistan Television won the inimitable Farooq Qaiser universal renown – so much so that his success in this line of work overshadowed his other talents. He was an artist, TV show director, puppeteer, script writer, voice actor, and newspaper columnist.

Besides his creative work, he served on the board of governors at the National Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage (LokVirsa), in Islamabad, in 2015 and also served a two-year stint in India as a member of UNESCO providing educational services. He received the Presidential Pride of Performance award in 1993 for his services to the field of arts and crafts in Pakistan. This year, he was awarded the Sitara-i-Imtiaz on Pakistan Day.

In his last social media post, Qaiser advised people to follow the SOPs issued by the government to control the spread of Covid-19.

According to some newspapers reports Qaiser's grandson, Hasnain Qaiser Iqbal, told that his grandfather had been suffering from a cardiac complication for some time. He added that the condition of the legendary artist worsened on the night of 14 May after which an ambulance rushed him to a hospital but he could not be revived.

He is survived by three children, a son and two daughters.

Funeral prayer of Farooq Qaiser was attended by politicians, artists, and members of civil society. He was buried at Islamabad.

Soon after the news of his demise, messages of condolence poured in from many public figures from different walks of life who paid homage to the legend's talent and the impact of his work.

Prime Minister Imran Khan wrote on Twitter, "Saddened to learn of Farooq Qaiser's death. He was not just a performer but would constantly raise awareness about social injustices and issues. My condolences and prayers go to his family."

Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry tweeted, "how big is the loss caused by the death of Farooq Qaiser, he revived centuries old craft of "Putli Tamasha" and created unforgettable character of #UncleSargam."

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid, meanwhile, expressed "deep sorrow and grief" on his death. He praised Qaiser as a "very intelligent" writer, playwright and cartoonist and hailed his ability to portray national issues through satire and humour.

"Uncle Sargam was popular with people of all ages because of his art and personality. His vacancy in journalism and television will never be filled."

Federal Education, National Heritage and Culture Minister Shafqat Mahmood said on his twitter account that "very sorry to learn of Farooq Qaiser's sad passing away. Uncle Sargam to an entire generation he left an indelible mark on our culture. May his soul rest in peace."



PML-N president Shehbaz Sharif said "grieved to learn about the passing away of Farooq Qaiser, a legend and icon of our times. He was part and parcel of generations that grew up watching his performances. He spread smiles through his work & his services for television will be remembered for long. Rest in peace."

PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz said Qaiser would be remembered for spreading smiles and laughter. "This perhaps is the biggest service you can do to your fellow humans. Thank you for the beautiful, unforgettable childhood memories like Uncle Sargam," she tweeted.

Director General Pakistan National Council of Arts Dr Fozia Saeed said that he was an iron man who fought all his life against the odds in society.

She praised him for being associated with PNCA's national puppet theatre and providing guidance in promoting puppetry art despite his deteriorating health and Coronavirus pandemic.

A renowned journalist Nadeem Farooq Paracha said "an unsung genius. Developed a puppet show for children on PTV in the 1970s, which evolved to become highly satirical. He created memorable characters, especially Uncle Sargam. One segment of the show was called, 'Science bari ya bhense' which mocked pseudoscience and quackery. RIP."

Farooq Qaiser has left this world for his eternal abode, but his characters and writings will always remain with us.



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Serenity is Chilim Jusht in the Time of Covid-19

No outsiders were allowed to the fabled annual spring festival of Chitral's Kalash people this year because of the nationwide lockdown prompted by Covid-19.



By Zahiruddin

While the nationwide lockdown centred on the Eidul Fitr holiday necessitated by the Covid-19 pandemic hassled most Pakistanis, the majority of the Kalash saw it as a blessing in disguise: For the first time in living memory, these proud pagans of Pakistan's Chitral region were able to commemorate their traditional spring festival unbothered by the irreverent gaze of strangers.

Chilim Jusht is a major annual festival of the Kalash people living in three adjacent valleys in southern Chitral – Bumburate, Birir and Rumbur. This year, this traditional festival coincided the Eidul Fitr, the Islamic festival of thanksgiving.

"We did enjoy our Chilim Jusht festival in an environment of solitude without being interrupted by the customary throngs of tourists because outsiders were not allowed to enter the Kalash valleys due to the Covid-19 pandemic", says Said Gul of Bumburate in a relaxed mood who has just arrived here from the valley.

"For the first time, it was an all-Kalash event during which we performed our rituals to the best of our satisfaction as there was no one to interrupt", says the young woman who is studying at Islamabad's Quaid-e-Azam University for an MPhil degree.

"Kalash is a way of life and our festivals including Chilim Jusht can be likened to religious events containing rituals sacred to us but seen by the outsiders as mere singing and dancing for amusement".

The traditional religion of the Kalash people dates at least as far back as the Rigveda although a small minority has embraced Islam.

The Chilim Jusht festival normally attracts a hordes of tourists from home and abroad. This time around, the valleys were closed to tourists, leaving the Kalash people to celebrate the six-day festival all by themselves, undisturbed by outsiders.

Gul said her people loved the crowd-free festival, but this serenity did not come without a price. The Kalash had to forego the economic benefits of the massive influx of tourists.

The festival commences from Rumbur valley on 12 May, in Bumburate on 13 and on 14 in Birir and continues for three days in each valley with the result that the concluding days for the valleys come in the same order of the commencement.

The concluding ceremony in Bumburate on 16 May is the major event and so remained this year where Kalash men and women from the other two valleys also participated with usual fervour and zeal.

As usual, processions of Kalash people from different villages reached the grassy ground near charsu (central dancing place) at Batrik village where they stayed for two hours.

Although standard operating procedures had been worked out by the Kalash elders for the festival to contain the spread of coronavirus, but apparently the revellers threw caution to the wind from the get go. Very few were found using facemasks and nobody bothered about the officially mandated physical distancing to prevent spread of the infection.

Another measure mandated to stem the spread of Covid-19 was a ban on travel between the valleys during the festival. The fate of this measure was no different from the other Covid safety SOPs as people were found moving freely between the valleys.

A group of foreign tourists consisting of 29 persons were among those debarred from entering the valleys of Bumburate and Rumbur but they were allowed to visit the concluding ceremony of the festival in Birir.

Jamshed Ahmed, a hotel owner said that the hotels remained closed during the festival. Normally, hotels are packed to capacity

and tents are pitched to accommodate the many guests who are unable to find hotel rooms.

Ahmed said that hoteliers wait for the festival all year, during which the number of tourists peaks. This more than makes up for the five-month break of the tourism industry dictated by the harsh Chitral winter.

But for the lockdown, business this year would be stellar because of the coincidence of the Eid holiday with Chilim Josht.

The entrance of the non-locals to the valleys had been banned strictly and all entrances to the valleys were guarded by the personnel of Chitral Police and Chitral Levies. The Commissioner and Regional Police Officer of Malakand Division had arrived in the Bumburate valley during the festival to monitor the situation in the valleys during the festival.

Special Assistant to the Chief Minister Wazir Zada participated in the concluding ceremony in his native valley of Rumbur. In compliance of the SOPs, he confined himself to the valley and did not move to the other two valleys during the festival.

Views similar to Gul's were expressed by the young and old members of Kalash community who pleaded for their privacy during the festival and demarcation of line for the tourists beyond which they should not be allowed.



PSL-6 Set to Add Sizzle to the Summer

Suspended midway in March after being beset by Covid-19, Pakistan's premier Twenty20 Cricket gala is set to return in June— in the UAE.



By Ali Abdullah

All is set for the final stretch of the sixth edition of Pakistan Super League (PSL) to return in June, although all the remaining matches have been moved to the UAE – as requested by the teams in view of the Covid-19 situation in Pakistan.

The six PSL franchises and the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) met on 19 May via a virtual press conference to discuss the remaining matches of the Pakistan Super League (PSL 6) in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). After getting a green signal yet awaited for some pending clarifications from the Emirates Cricket Board (ECB), the mission of PCB-PSL is to plan the strategies and implementing them from 1 June 2021.

The event was suspended amidst the COVID-19 threats after fourteen out of thirty group matches were down and dusted. The final of the PSL 6 is revised to be played on 20th June.

A PCB statement said, “In today’s online discussion, we updated the team owners that the PCB had been advised that the PSL had received approvals from the relevant authorities in the UAE. However, some clarifications on certain exemption requests are still awaited”.

A couple of days later, there were rumors all over the place that PSL sixth edition is postponed again till further notice. The basis for these rumors was that the broadcasting team is from India and South Africa. The problem is that both these countries are not safe due to the Covid-19 global pandemic and the UAE have banned flights from both the countries.

The very next day the management confirmed that PSL VI would indeed resume from June 1st in UAE and final will be

played on 20th June. Islamabad United and Lahore Qalandars will play the first match.

According to the points table Karachi Kings is leading the chart with 6 points. Not to forget they are also the defending champions. Peshawar Zalmi are on number 2 and Islamabad on 3. The bottom three are Lahore Qalandars, Multan Sultans, and Quetta Gladiators. However, given that sixteen group matches are yet to be played, the points table can turn upside down.

The change of venue may also have a bearing on the fortunes of the teams. If we look at the past, teams like Lahore Qalandars and Karachi Kings, which have performed very well in the last two seasons of PSL, failed to perform every single time the PSL took place in the UAE. The weather and venue has changed and there is a possibility that performances will also change.

All six teams have made some changes in their squads due to unavailability of their foreign players. Not only new foreign players but some local talent will also get a chance to share dressing rooms with international superstars.

Another news regarding PSL is that Pakistani superstar Shahid Afridi in a recent interview said he would love to play for Quetta Gladiators only if his current team Multan Sultans releases him.

Hopefully PSL-6 will end on 20 June without any Covid cases and any other upset. Hopefully bio-secure bubble will be more airtight this time than it was in March.

Turf War

A playground lost to illegal encroachment by Islamabad's lawyers is finally reclaimed by the civic authorities.

By Asad Malik

The black coats have finally surrendered the soccer playground to the Capital Development Authority (CDA) after about a decade-long illegal occupation. Perhaps this was the first instance the lawyers' community giving in to civic authority since the rise of judicial activism of 2009 that led to the reinstatement of Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry as the Chief Justice of Pakistan (CJP).

The playground measuring 345 by 419 feet (1,6061.66 square yards) was developed with the object of offering sports facilities to the general public including playing sports such as football and volleyball. It is situated next to a commercial area where the administration of the Islamabad Capital Territory had rented privately owned buildings more than four decades ago for the District Courts.

The encroachment started about a decade ago. However, in 2013, the then elected representatives of the Islamabad Bar permitted about 500 lawyers to construct chambers in the playground and formally made allotments as well.

According to a report of the CDA, the encroachment of the playground had started in 2013. The Islamabad District Bar had also filed a suit in the court and secured a restraining order against the imminent anti encroachment drive of the civic agency.

It ironically manifests failure of the state to enforce its writ by ignoring the most obvious and grave breaches of enforced laws. Expediency and resort to the doctrine of necessity appears to have become an acceptable norm, giving rise to erosion of rule of law.

The CDA Ordinance of 1960 explicitly shows that it is a self-contained, comprehensive and special statute enacted for establishing the CDA and having the object and purpose of making all arrangements for the planning and development of Islamabad within the framework of the regional development plan.

The Ordinance and regulations and rules framed for its enforcement are applicable and attracted in the entire land consisting of 1,400 square miles of the Islamabad Capital Territory.

The expression "illegal construction" is defined in the Zoning Regulations of 1992 as meaning construction carried out without the permission of the CDA and in contravention of rules and regulations or any laws for the time being enforced in the Islamabad Capital Territory.

The unregulated illegal construction has profound consequences in the context of irreversible damage to the environment. Therefore, enforcing the existing enforced laws and regulatory framework in the Islamabad Capital Territory has become inevitable.

The backstory of the encroachment of the playground has another subtheme. It speaks to how low a priority the successive governments attached to the establishment of Islamabad's district judiciary.



Federal Capital was established in 1960. However, no area was earmarked for the district judiciary. Citizen living in Islamabad used to go to Rawalpindi for litigation. In 1980 the sessions courts were established in Islamabad. Since there was no appropriate land for the courts, the courts were set up in rented commercial buildings as a stopgap measure.

The issue of playground and other encroachments in the surrounding of Sector F-8 Markaz of Islamabad has been highlighted by the media since 2013. In the last couple of years, IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah took up the matter of the construction of judicial complex with the federal government.

The government has earmarked a separate five (5) acre plots for local judiciary and lawyers so that the enrolled advocates of the Islamabad Bar Council can establish facilities for themselves.

It has been told to the IHC that a consultant has been appointed and the process of approvals has been put on a fast track so that a state-of-the-art judicial complex can be built at the allotted plot without further delay.

The district courts are the most important tier of the judicial branch because it mostly serves those who are not privileged to be part of the elites. The vast majority of litigants at this level are the common people including victims of state failures. The role of the bench and the bar is to serve them.

It is a constitutional obligation of the executive branch of the State to ensure that the litigants have meaningful access to the courts. This right has been denied to the people and litigants in disregard to the constitutional mandate under Article 37 of the Constitution.

Dispensation of inexpensive and expeditious justice is impossible when the executive branch of the state fails in its constitutional duty to provide an adequate working environment, the IHC said, adding that the hallmark of a vibrant society is an efficient justice system having the attributes of judicial quality and independence.

Rendezvous with Rising Star Amar Khan

Actor, writer, director: She is the best thing to happen to the Pakistani showbiz in a long time.



By Hasan Kazami

Although she is relatively a newcomer, there are unmistakable signs Amar Khan may be the best thing that happen to the Pakistani entertainment industry in a long, long time. A writer and director in her own right, she has already made her mark as an actor in a very short span of time.

Amar attributes her success in acting to the care she exercises when accepting a role. Up until now, she has made sure every new role is different from others and she is determined to keep things that way in the future as well.

Amar made waves playing the witch Neelofur in Producer Momina Duraid supernatural horror drama series *Belapur Ki Dayan* in 2018, when she bagged the IPPA Award for Best Female Debut and won a nomination for each of Lux Style Awards for Best Emerging Talent, Hum Award for Best Actor in a Negative Role, and Hum Award for Best Supporting Actress.

She has since performed in several productions including Geo TV's on-going drama serial *Qayamat* as Samra, an educated but simple girl who is victim of domestic violence. One of her upcoming projects is her film *Dam Mastum* – written by herself – in which she is the female lead opposite Imran Ashraf.

The Truth International (TTI) had an opportunity to get up close and personal with this brilliant starlet, discussing in detail her professional approach and her thoughts on social issues. Given below is an abridged transcript of the conversation for your reading pleasure.

TTI: What made you to accept the character of Samra?

AK: I have so far done very dominating and overpowering characters but never a role that could connect with the masses at length. Although a formula role, the Samra of *Qayamat* has a theme that millions of women should be able to relate to. The issue of domestic abuse and violence against women is very common especially in countries like Pakistan. So I embraced Samra as a great opportunity to connect with every woman.

TTI: How was your experience of working with your co-star Ahsan Khan?

AK: I started off my career with Ahsan Khan. It was a short film for Hum TV with him just after I graduated from my film school. To be honest, he was one of the reasons for which I said yes to *Qayamat*.

I knew that the couple in the script had a very crackling and fiery chemistry. Both are very diverse characters. One is a spoiled and arrogant brat from a powerful family while the girl is educated but at the same time very naive and weak. I thought that combination would be liked by viewers.

There are three to four reasons for an actor to say yes to a project. How is the script, who is the director, which channel or platform it would be relayed on, and who the other lead is? So when I heard that Ahsan is playing the male lead in the play, I thought it was going to be fireworks.

Other cast members like Neelam Muneer, Saba Faisal, and Shabbir Jan were great to work with. It was a pleasure to be

with Haroon Shahid, though my work was a bit short with him on-screen but as I am a big fan of music so I used to listen to a lot of songs from him off-screen.

TTI: In many scenes of Qayamat, the character of Rashid (Ahsan Khan) physically abuses you. How did you manage. Was some if it real?

AK: A good actor has to balance this. For instance, when you push or grab someone's hair, it can be handled with imitated force but when you have to clutch the face of a character in wrath, it should be done with technique.

Ahsan knew where to actually put more force to depict it as real and spontaneous and where he had to mime and I had to express stronger reaction of pain and humiliation. To me, those were very action oriented and stunt driven scenes and we both had a very good understanding doing them.

It is very awkward for an actor if they are not comfortable with their costars doing this type of scenes as you are touched in a certain way by them that you might not like to be in actual life. I had to comprehend that he was not Ahsan and I was not Amar. We were those characters. So if you are not able to do justice to that, I think the whole narrative fails to take off.

TTI: Do you think that our TV dramas should take a step forward from just presenting violence and abuse of women to showing a way out to them?

AK: Yes, I think they should but a formula theme is a sure shot which the wider audience can relate and connect to. This rule is not just for dramas but for films also like a Salman Khan film which has action, comedy, tragedy, romance even dances in one pack, the chances of its success are higher and it usually becomes a hit film.

On the other hand, if we are working on an experimental subject, it might not get that reach. The producers always try to go with the script (even if it is issue based) that could connect to more people. I believe that domestic abuse is a serious topic and we are denying its seriousness by not showing it on television. I agree that more progressive and mature content must also be shown but there is always an audience for household stories like Qayamat.

TTI: Drama is called a medium of masses. Can it carry a powerful message and bring about social change?

AK: Whenever I go through a story, I always extract the inspiring moral of it. It is up to the receiver how they perceive it, whether they are getting the negative part or going with the positive side of message is up to them.

I don't think that our audiences are simple minded that if something bad or negative is shown on television just to reinforce that as bad, it will inspire them to do the same. Instead of undermining and underestimating the public, we should trust their upbringing, education, and humanity. Stories are always inspiring. They have both villainous and good characters whether we lift them from our religion, history, or everyday life.

TTI: Do you think Pakistan showbiz needs campaigns like MeToo movement?

AK: Women are raising their voice for their fundamental rights be it Aurat March or the MeToo movement. Besides, if anything else wrong is happening elsewhere in the world and being addressed with our freedom of speech, it is peoples right. For instance there's a very powerful movement named 'I am unbeatable' against domestic abuse in the West. If it is there, it has an objective to stop violence against women. I believe everything has some reason behind it.

So instead of curbing and banning them, we have to think how constructively these movements can benefit the society as a whole. It might take some time but if we have a positive will and strong objectives, it will bring about change.

TTI: Social media has become a mouthpiece of hate speech and trolling. Being a celebrity, you face more of this kind of negativity. How do you cope with it?

AK: I just ignore the trolls. Like if I get 500 comments and among them 490 are positive and 10 are negative, I engage with the majority instead of the minority.

TTI: What next?

AK: I have completed my film Dam Mastam and waiting for the Covid-19 pandemic to get over the cinema to reopen before it can be released.



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Dracula

The Dracula in Bram Stoker's book is not the vampire you might expect. Movies and other pop culture interpretations usually miss the mark when it comes to the novel's central character. The original Dracula is not a romantic hero. He's a monster, driven by his hunger for blood and his uncontrolled lust to take what he wants.

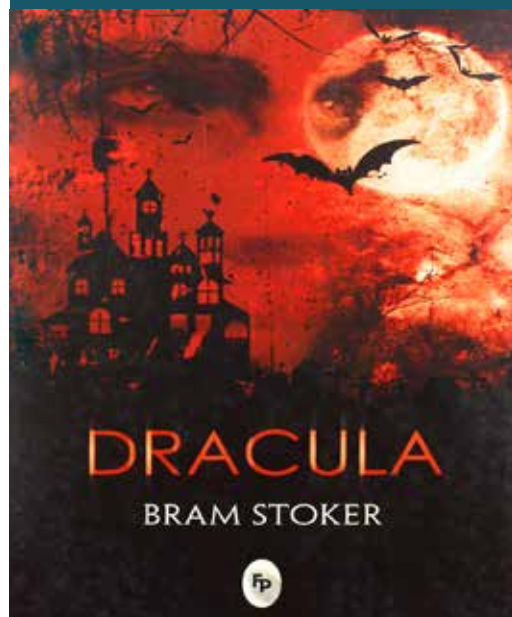
There are three things that will surprise contemporary readers when they pick up this classic novel. The first is how little horror there really is in the book. It may seem strange to say it, but the body count is surprisingly low. There's only a few moments of real white-knuckle terror scenes. During the trip he takes out members of the crew one by one, and you can feel the desperation and fear grow with each new entry in the ship's logs.

The novel is a fascinating entity. The book also features many details and plot points unfamiliar to someone who knows Dracula only from their general pop culture sensitivity, allowing the reader to have the best of both worlds.

The main characters are all very well portrayed, each with a separate personality, quirks and role to play in the story. The story itself is heartbreaking, full of the emotion of the characters as they deal with life, death and love. Dracula touches on many themes; savagery, love, religion, and technology to name just a few. It leaves you thinking upon it for a long time afterwards and is required reading for any fan of horror or vampires.

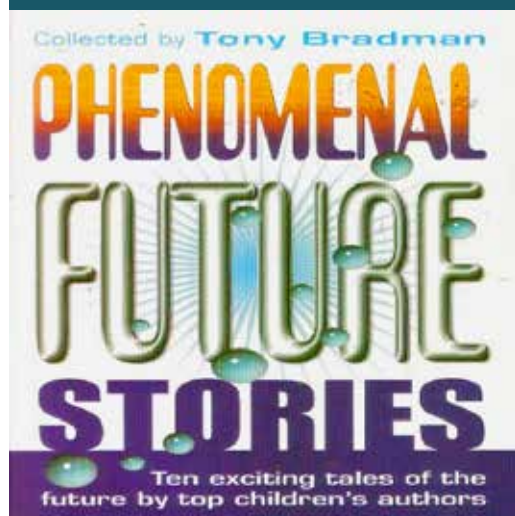
I really enjoyed reading the contemporary book. It kept surprising me with horror content. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 12 as there is some inappropriate content that might be disturbing for little children.

Author: Bram Stoker
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 0-14-036717-9
Publisher: PuffinClassics
Pages: 520



Phenomenal Future Stories

Author: Tony Bradman
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 0-552-54623-2
Publisher: Transworld Publishers Ltd
Pages: 205



A cloned boy looking for his 'father'; the dramatic rescue of a captive tiger; the submersion of the Scottish isles in a flood; a girl who finds out why cyber-pets will never be as good as the real thing - are among the fascinating scenarios conjured up in this world-shattering collection of original stories published for the new Millennium.

This book has many fascinating stories together which makes the book even more fun to read and can make you laugh quite often. The book also features many different details and plot points.

The main characters of every story were perfect for everyone. They were perfectly acted and each one of these characters had fascinating personalities.

All the stories were full of emotions and beautifully put together. The book features different themes like love, responsibility, technology, sadness, loneliness, and other important life learning lessons.

The book did not disappoint at all. It is a first class collection of many stories that consist of high quality content.

I really enjoyed this book as it has many fun stories that kept me entertained. I would definitely recommend this to my family and friends. This book would be suitable for children above the age of 8 or 9 so that they actually understand the content.



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