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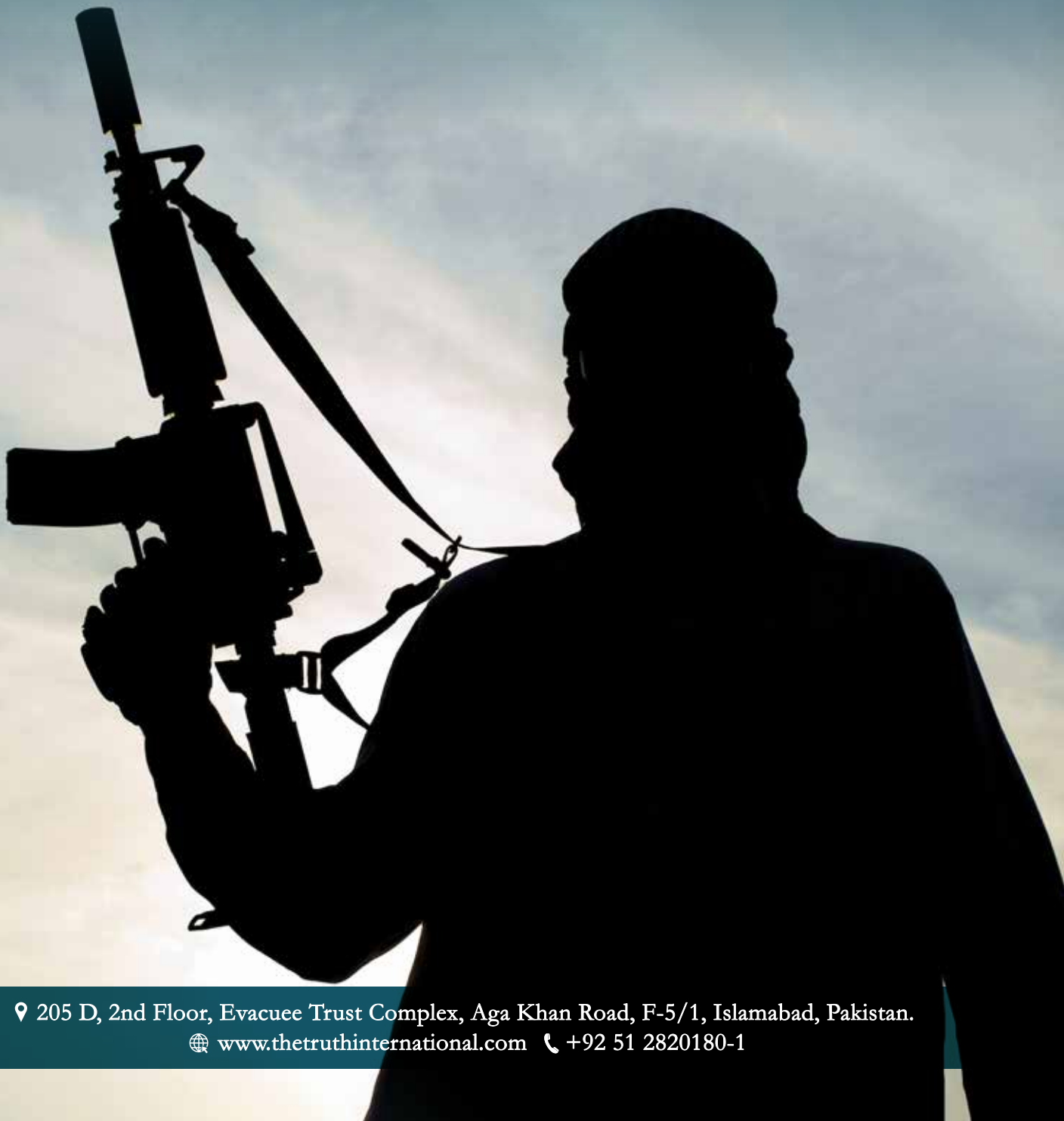
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Afghanistan: Free-For-All Groups
Taliban cannot budge from their fighters posture

The Taming of Politicians
How Govt & opposition leaders suddenly became civilized?

The Anatomy of Pakistan's Power Crisis
Power outages expose poor governance

Afghanistan Again Uncertain



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CONTENTS

On the Cover

“Our decision for now is to fight,” a member of the Taliban powerful “Rehbari Shura” or leadership council told The Truth International (TTI) last week. He said the Taliban leaders had not yet taken a decision to stop the war.

In Afghanistan, a Free-For-All by Tahir Khan – **Page 06**

Editorial

It is just not cricket! by M. Ziauddin – **Page 04**

Eid-ul-Azha

Celebrating the Great Sacrifice of Patriarch Abraham by Ahmer Kureishi – **Page 05**

Foreign Affairs

Kabul Digging in to Fight Off the Taliban by Haq Nawaz Khan – **Page 08**

Partners in Peace, Not in War by Umer Farooq – **Page 10**

Biden’s Paradoxical Approach to Military Presence by Hamzah Rifaat Hussain – **Page 12**

Knave’s Gambit by Dr Moonis Ahmar – **Page 13**

From the Kingdom of Solomon to the State of Israel by Azmat Mumtaz Saqib – **Page 15**

German Chancellor: She Earned Tons of Respect Not Money, TTI Report – **Page 17**

Politics

The Taming of the Politicians by Khalid Wasim – **Page 18**

No Clear Winner Expected in AJK Election by Wajih Safarish Khan – **Page 21**

The Match Losing Potential of Wasim Akram Plus by Ahmad Waleed – **Page 23**

Economy

Of Pakistan, FATF, and International Coercion by Mehtab Haider – **Page 24**

Pakistan’s Strong Recovery Outpaces World Bank’s Assessment by Javed Mahmood – **Page 26**

Pakistan & Eurobonds by Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi – **Page 30**

A Tightrope Between Belt Tightening and Growth – **Page 33**

The Anatomy of Pakistan’s Power Crisis by Meer Diam – **Page 35**

When Justice is Not Justice by Azfar Ashfaq – **Page 37**

Investigation

Can Pakistan Tax the Tech Giants? By Azeem Waqas – **Page 39**

Pakistani press is free to suffer y Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 41**

Social Issue

Whither Population Welfare? By Muhammad Zahid Rifat – **Page 42**

COVID-19

Another Eid, Another Call for Strict Observance of SOPs by Noor Aftab – **Page 44**

Health

Your Mental Health Matters by Haider Rifaat – **Page 46**

Environment

Tackling the Existential Threat of Climate Change by Maheen Dhanani – **Page 47**

Sports

Pakistan Face ODI Whitewash in England by Ali Abdullah – **Page 48**

Euro-2020: Italians celebrate their victory against England by Javed Mahmood – **Page 50**

Entertainment

Hum Style Awards Herald the Return to Normal with a Bang by Hasan Kazmi – **Page 51**

The Moral Brigade Does it Again by Zainab Umer – **Page 53**

The Original Superstar of the Subcontinental Cinema Dies by Gohar Imdad – **Page 54**

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Region is holding its breath

By M. Ziauddin



America's forever war has suddenly turned into a long suspension of uncertainty for countries in the neighborhood of the war torn Afghanistan. A civil war is waiting to happen inside. And outside, terror-filled air seems lurking over the region, far and wide. Almost about 85 per cent of Afghanistan has already fallen to Afghan Taliban virtually without serious bloody clashes. Tajik, Uzbek, Iranian, Chinese and Pakistani borders are being reinforced to prevent the war from spilling over and also to block the possibility of new waves of refugees.

So far the Taliban have not tried to attack the handful of cities including Kabul seemingly well defended by the Afghan Armed Forces. Neither have they tried to cross over the Tajik borders across which the Afghan troops have decamped escaping the onrushing Taliban.

What's next for the Taliban? Two decades, thousands of lives, and hundreds of billions of U.S. dollars later, the Taliban have all the momentum in Afghanistan. How far can they advance into Afghanistan? Will they abandon some of their extremist views as they try to polish their international image?

The 2021 Taliban are said to have little in common with their 2001 pre-war on terror incarnation. The movement has evolved from a largely Ghilzai Pashtun rural guerrilla insurgency to a more inter-ethnic arrangement, incorporating Tajiks, Uzbeks and even Shi'ite Hazaras – a group that was mercilessly persecuted during the 1996-2001 years of Taliban power.

Reliable figures are extremely hard to come by, but 30% of the Taliban today may be non-Pashtuns. One of the top commanders is ethnically Tajik – and that explains the lightning-flash “soft” blitzkrieg in northern Afghanistan across Tajik territory.

The governments in the neighborhood seem all tongue-tied as they could neither extend their whole-hearted support to Ghani regime in Kabul lest they burn the bridges they would need to cross in the process of engaging the Taliban and nor could they greet the Taliban lest they

damage the chances of engaging with a Ghani-led transitional Afghan regime.

The Taliban had been to Moscow four months earlier, along with the extended troika (Russia, US, China, Pakistan) to debate the new Afghan power equation.

On the latest trip, they emphatically assured their interlocutors there's no Taliban interest in invading any territory of their Central Asia neighbors.

Kabul's refusal to form a transitional government is “promoting a belligerent solution” to the drama. This implies that the neighbors expect much more flexibility from both Kabul and the Taliban in the Sisyphean power-sharing task ahead.

Meanwhile, Pepe Escobar (Say hello to the diplo-Taliban, published in Asia Times on July 9, 2021) has quoted Mohammad Suhail Shaheen, the spokesman for the Taliban political office claiming “taking Afghanistan by military force is not our policy. Our policy is to find a political solution to the Afghan issue, which is continuing in Doha.”

“That's absolutely correct. The Taliban don't want a bloodbath. They want to be embraced. As Shaheen has stressed, it would be easy to conquer major cities – but there would be blood. Meanwhile, the Taliban already control virtually the whole border with Tajikistan.

“The inhabitants, speaking Dari, are now turning over their villages and towns to Tajik Taliban as a matter of trust. Very few – if any – Pashtuns from Kandahar or Jalalabad are involved.

“Thinking ahead to “when an Islamic government is in place,” Shaheen insists there will be “good relations” with every nation, and embassies and consulates will not be targeted.”

The Russians, for one thing, are already engaging the Taliban, in detail, and may soon strike their name off their terror list.

The Chinese, for another, are assured that if the Taliban commit Afghanistan to join the Belt and Road Initiative, connecting via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor,

ISIS-Khorasan will not then be permitted to go on overdrive in Afghanistan bolstered by Uyghur jihadis currently in Idlib.

Closer home, Pakistani leaders are convinced they can use their leverage over the Taliban to win concessions from the US. American combat troops will have left Afghanistan by September. That's also when the International Monetary Fund conducts a much-delayed review of its \$6 billion bailout of Pakistan. Prime Minister Imran Khan, is very conscious that elections are only two years away. So, the budget his government presented last month didn't quite meet the IMF's demands. Khan also doesn't want to abandon the so-called Riyasaat-i-Madina welfare state he promised voters in 2018. The IMF won't be happy. The government hopes that the US need for help in stabilizing Afghanistan after the withdrawal should give Pakistan “some space,” particularly when it comes to the IMF. Playing such games has not served Pakistan well in the past. The last time Afghanistan fell to the Taliban, Pakistan had to deal with a flood of refugees and the permanent destabilization of its Pashtun-majority border areas. Worse, the Taliban have incubated and inspired other extremist movements, including in Pakistan itself. Between 2008 and 2016, the Pakistani version of the Taliban struck at will across the country — most horrifically, killing 132 schoolchildren in an army school in Peshawar in December 2014.

Geopolitical conditions are also less favorable now for Pakistan. Islamabad in the past prospered by picking the American side in the cold war. But a world increasingly shaped by disputes between the US and China doesn't look to be as profitable.

Khan told the New York Times that what he really wanted was for the US and China to “get on and trade with each other” — perhaps so his government could receive handouts from both. But the U.S. doesn't trust a Pakistan that it fears will use bailout money to repay Chinese loans. And China would certainly not feel comfortable being seen using loans to sustain CPEC.

Celebrating the Great Sacrifice of Patriarch Abraham

Eid-ul-Azha, Eid-e-Qurban, Baqra Eid, Barri Eid – the Islamic festival of sacrifice is called by many names in Pakistan, but the spirit remains the same.



By Ahmer Kureishi

Muslims in Pakistan and around the world are preparing to celebrate Eid ul Azha – the Islamic festival of sacrifice – to commemorate Patriarch Abraham’s total submission to the will of Allah to the extent of offering his dear son as blood sacrifice.

Known in the Islamic tradition as Ibrahim (PBUH), Patriarch Abraham has an exalted status in each of the three Abrahamic regions – Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. There are some variations in the precise details of his life and times in each of these great religious traditions. The son he is ordered to sacrifice, for instance, was Ismail under the Islamic tradition but Isaac according to the Judeo-Christian tradition.

However, Abraham’s characterization across all three faiths is uniform: He was a great friend and consummate devotee of God.

The Holy Quran relates the story of the consummation of Abraham’s sacrifice:

‘And when they had both submitted and he put him down upon his forehead, We called to him, “O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision.” Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was the clear trial. And We ransomed him with a great sacrifice, And We left for him [favourable mention] among later generations: “Peace upon Ibrahim.” Indeed, We thus reward the doers of good. Indeed, he was of Our believing servants.’ (Qur’an, 37: 103-11)

According to the Old Testament, God addressed Abraham thus:

“Take now Your son, Your only son ..., whom you love... and offer him there”. (Genesis 22:2, NKJV).

In the New Testament, St. Paul interprets this injunction in these words:

“By faith Abraham, when he was tested, offered up [his son], and he who had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, ... concluding that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead, from which he also received him in a figurative sense” (Hebrews 11:17-19, NKJV).

Abraham’s faith in God and His doings was tested – and found true. His unwavering faith was rewarded when God ransomed his son with a ram. Says the Holy Qur’an:

And when they had both submitted and he (Ibrahim) had laid him on his forehead, We called to him, “O Ibrahim, you have fulfilled the vision”. Indeed, in this way, We reward the doers of good. Indeed, this was certainly a clear trial. And We ransomed him a great sacrifice, and We left for him among later generations: Peace upon Ibrahim”.

(Qur’an, 37:103-109)

The way Jews, Muslims, and Christians worldwide hold Abraham in high esteem is a testament to how God exalted the status of his friend “among later generations” –

and the Muslim commemoration of Eid ul Azha factors into it in a big way.

Tens of millions of Muslims worldwide will be thinking of the Prophet Ibrahim, the great friend of Allah, and how he was rewarded for reposing unquestioning faith in Allah.

Notably, human sacrifice is not part of any of the Abrahamic religions. The moral of the story of the Prophet Ibrahim (PBUH) is that a true devotee of Allah has must have complete faith in Allah and His doings and must submit totally to the will of Allah.

The Arabic word for sacrifice is Qurbani, which also connotes altruism. Charitable giving is therefore a key subtheme of the festival. Well-off Muslims who sacrifice animals must give away a third of the meat to the poor. Another third is reserved for family relations – reflecting the emphasis Islam places on family ties.

Thus, a Muslim may keep for his own family’s consumption only a third of the meat from an animal they have sacrificed – which amply highlights the charitable aspect of the festival of Qurbani. Under Pakistani cultural traditions, this portion is used to feast friends and neighbours.

The Eid-ul-Azha celebration starts every year on the 10th of Dhul Hijjah, the twelfth month of the Islamic Hijri lunar calendar, and continues for three days. This year, the day coincides with 21 July in Pakistan.

In Afghanistan, a Free-For-All

Taliban cannot budge from their belligerent posture for fear of splintering, and insider told TTI.



By Tahir Khan

“Our decision for now is to fight,” a member of the Taliban powerful “Rehbari Shura” or leadership council told The Truth International (TTI) last week. He said the Taliban leaders had not yet taken a decision to stop the war.

A Taliban scholar, who is part of a commission of the Taliban religious scholars, argues the Taliban will not join the present set up, as any such decision will break-up the group. He said it has never been the policy of the Taliban to share power with anyone and they had ruled over 90 percent of Afghanistan alone during 1996-2001.

Comments by the two Taliban leaders reflect the insurgents’ mood to overrun more areas in the war-shattered country at a time when intra-Afghan negotiations face a stalemate. Iran hosted the Taliban and representatives in Tehran on July 7-8 to push the talks among Afghans forward.

The Taliban showed courtesy to Iran’s official invitation as Iran now wants to play an active role in the Afghan peace process. Tehran has kept its distance from all peace initiatives because of the involvement of the United States. But now the Islamic Republic wants to be part of the process.

Taliban seem to have built a level of mutual trust with Iran and Russia incomparable with their relationship with any other country. They had a trilateral meeting with the Russian and Iranian foreign ministry officials in Tehran on 8 July.

The Taliban delegations had also visited Russia and Iran when Joe Biden hinted for the first time to miss the 1 May deadline for withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan.

As the Taliban seek diplomatic support, they sent two delegations of political

representatives to Tehran on 7-8 July and Moscow on 8 July to brief them about the Taliban offensives across Afghanistan that surprised many in the world.

The Taliban now claim control of over 200 out of 421 districts of Afghanistan. The major and unexpected development was the Taliban advance in northern parts of Afghanistan, the non-Pash-tun majority areas of Afghanistan.

The Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid told The Truth International on 9 July the militia now controls 238 districts in the country. The Afghan government disputes the Taliban claim and insists that the Taliban have been expelled from several districts and reinforcements were being rushed to retake the districts. Officials also say they have withdrawn forces from some areas as a war strategy to avoid civilian casualties.

Taliban on 8 July took control of the Islam Qala – a major transit route between Afghanistan and Iran – as part of their offensive across the country.

Islam Qala crossing point in western Herat province is the third border crossing the Taliban have captured this month. Earlier they seized another key crossing – Shir Khan Bandar – in northern Kunduz province bordering Tajikistan. Almost all districts in northwestern Badghis province, bordering Uzbekistan, are now controlled by the insurgents.

The Taliban also overran the Wakhan district in Northern Badakhshan province that borders China. Their fighters are now stationed along the border crossings with Pakistani, Iran, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan and all these countries have genuine concerns about the spillover of the war.

Although the Taliban delegation assured Russian special envoy for Afghanistan Zamir Kabulov on 8 July they would pose no threat to neighbours, it would be hard for Afghanistan's neighbours to trust the Taliban.

China had long been concerned over the presence of their armed opponents in Afghanistan and the capturing of Wakhan

district that border China's Muslim-majority Xinjiang autonomous region will be a matter of serious concern.

Pakistan has deep concerns over the possible nexus of the Pakistani and Afghan Taliban, rise in the TTP's activities in Pakistan, and the influx of refugees in Pakistan. The same concern was conveyed to the senate foreign relations committee by the National Security Adviser Moeed Yousaf on 9 July, days after the army and the intelligence (ISI) chiefs shared the same concerns with the members of the parliamentary security committee.

President Biden's announcement on 8 July to withdraw all troops by 31 August is expected to encourage the Taliban to further intensify their operations amid growing fears of a civil war. Several Afghan provinces have seen the emergence of private militias in recent days.

Several leaders including Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostam, former Balkh governor Atta Muhammad Noor, and Shiite Hizb-e-Wahdat leader Mohammad Mohaqiq are in the forefront to encourage private militias and the so-called popular uprisings in parts of the country.

Zalmay Khalilzad, who secured a landmark deal with the Taliban, has shown

concerns over the formation of private militias despite the presence of over 300,000 security forces in Afghanistan. The preparation of private militias has further increased concerns about a possible civil war that threatens a repeat of the events of the early 1990s when 50,000 people were killed in internecine fighting in capital Kabul alone.

Mr Biden's remarks that he would not want to send another American generation to Afghanistan is a message for Afghans to decide their future and to stop killing Afghan generations. But unfortunately the Taliban and the Afghan government negotiation team have failed to make substantial progress in negotiations that started on 12 September.

The two sides still have the opportunity to find a negotiated settlement. They will have to step back from their stated maximalist positions on a future set up. The main hurdle to the negotiations is that President Ashraf Ghani wants the Taliban to join the present set up and the Taliban demand replacement of the Ghani administration with an Islamic government.

If the rival Afghan factions stick to their positions, more Afghans civilians will die in the senseless war.



Kabul Digging in to Fight Off the Taliban

Pakistani Pashtun leader cries foul over what he sees as US lending unnecessary legitimacy to the Taliban ahead of troops' withdrawal.



By Haq Nawaz khan

With many in Afghanistan and Pakistan taking a dubious view of the way the United States is ending its longest war, the authorities in Kabul are encouraging tribes and common Afghans to take up arms in a bid to check the advance of the Taliban.

On the other hand, there is a deep unease in Afghanistan as well as in Pakistan's Pashtun belt over the way the US is giving the Taliban a virtual walk over, with leaders and commoners alike questioning US motives in engaging with the Taliban months ahead of the Doha talks, leaving the Afghan government out of the process.

"The abrupt US withdrawal is an attempt to impose Taliban in Afghanistan," Mohsin Dawar, an elected member of Pakistan National Assembly, told The Truth International (TTI). "We don't call it a peace deal, but a US withdrawal deal. Afghan government was bypassed and was not taken on board in the peace process".

Dawar said the US had unnecessarily given legitimacy to the Taliban, and undermined the elected government of Afghanistan. "The US-NATO alliance is responsible for this chaos in Afghanistan. The Taliban may not take over Kabul anytime soon, but chaos is already here. The level of confidence of the Taliban is a reflection of US support for them."

Against this backdrop, reports coming from Afghanistan reveal Kabul is bolstering some armed groups to fight alongside ANA forces, ostensibly to counter the new offensive strategy of Taliban to bring more and more areas under their control through armed attacks.

Afghan President Dr Ashraf Ghani told his cabinet in a recent meeting, "There is no question of surrendering to Taliban." "Taliban's dream of Kabul's surrender will not come true, even if hundreds of years pass."

International observers and the common Afghans are united in their concern that instead of focusing on the Afghan peace dialogue, the Kabul government and Taliban are pushing the country into a bloody internal war. Afghan government is now considering to respond to the Taliban's strategy in the same way.

"I am not optimistic of this war ending anytime soon", an Afghan from Helmand told a newspaper recently. "We have seen nothing but war for decades – and we have learnt nothing but fighting."

On their part, the Taliban see the withdrawal of US led foreign forces from Afghanistan as a major victory. Suhail Shaheen, a spokesman for the political office of Taliban in Doha, Qatar, told TTI in an exclusive interview via phone, "The end of foreign occupation was one of the basic demands of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan [Taliban term for their organisation]".

The Afghan Taliban have repeatedly insisted no foreign troops would be allowed to stay on the Afghan soil. Some media reports say the US is planning to keep some troops back to protect the US Embassy, and the movement of American officials in Afghanistan. Shaheen categorically rejected such reports. "We are capable enough to protect our installations as well as our guests."

And he sounded a warning, "We will be free to take decision if the complete withdrawal of foreign troops does not materialise."

Shaheen said the US had already violated the Doha deal by delaying the troops' withdrawal, and said any attempt to keep US troops back in Afghanistan would be another violation of the deal. "We will review the situation, and take decision the warranted action," he said. "The US will be held responsible for [the consequences]."

Post-War Afghanistan

The implementation of Doha peace agreement has been taking longer than the expected timeframe. The swapping of some 6000 prisoners took six months to complete, which was agreed to take place in days. The next step was the beginning of intra-Afghan dialogue, which also started much later than the planned deadline.

The Taliban and the Afghan government agreed in the Doha peace agreement to seek a political settlement, but there has been almost no progress on intra-Afghan talks. Initially there were hopes a stable and representative political government will be left behind after the withdrawal of foreign forces, but no such solution is in sight with the deadline for withdrawal just round the corner.

The Afghan sides put the blame for unnecessary delay on one another. The Kabul administration holds Taliban negotiators responsible for not taking interest in the talks.

Kabul is asking for a ceasefire to have meaningful talks, but the Taliban argue once there is a comprehensive peace agreement, there would be a permanent ceasefire in the country. Suhail Shaheen accused the government of pushing ceasefire to advance its own agenda of disarming the Taliban fighters.

Kabul sees the Taliban offensive as a self-serving power grab. A Kabul government senior official, who heads Information wing, Dawa Khan Menapaal, in an interview criticised the Taliban's heightened violence and their reluctance to engage Kabul in talks.

Mr Menapaal questioned Taliban's fight when the foreign troops are leaving Afghanistan, "The latest increase in violence shows Taliban are fighting for control of Kabul. Now there is no reason to fight Afghan forces."

He conceded surge in violence had surprised everyone including Kabul, but asserted the government was devising a plan to retake the fallen districts and stop Taliban advances. "We were not expecting such attacks. We still have control of majority districts, and those captured by Taliban are in the remote areas."

Shaheen said it was thanks to the sacrifices of thousands of Taliban fighters' sacrifices that the Taliban were finally recognised as a just movement. "More and more people are joining us and in many districts, the forces belonging to Kabul regime are voluntarily surrendering to our fighters. They are handing over their weapons to Taliban."

"We will continue our campaign in the battlefield, but we will not shut the door to talks", Shaheen said. "We have learnt from the past, so we want to reach every group to have peace all across the country. We want an Islamic government in Kabul with representation from all groups."

To the question if the Taliban will try to take Kabul by force after the pull-out of the foreign forces, Taliban officials say no. Shaheen said, "We want to have a peaceful settlement of the conflict. Everyone is tired of the and we want to have lasting peace in Afghanistan."

Asked if the Taliban had extended any assurances to the international community not to take over Kabul by force, Shaheen again replied in the negative. "We have not given any such assurances to the world, but yes, we have agreed to reach a political settlement through talks."

The Americans landed in the Taliban controlled Afghanistan 20 years ago, and ousted Taliban of Kabul with the support of former Mujahidin warlords from the North

to South and East to West. The US-led NATO alliance announced to free Afghanistan of Taliban and other international militants like al Qaida and other regional groups.

However, now that the alliance troops are pulling out, the Taliban are in a much stronger position on the ground in Afghanistan.

On the upside, the US-led alliance did manage to dismantle and displace al Qaida by eliminating its top, second, and third tier leadership. The most wanted man Osama Bin Laden was killed, leaving the network in disarray.

Americans also sought guarantees from Taliban that Afghan soil would not be used against the US, her allies and other countries. However, there have been reports alleging the Taliban of hosting foreign militants including some from al Qaida, and some insurgents from neighbouring countries.

The neighbouring countries are also keeping a close eye on the situation in Afghanistan. Pakistan is worried about the possible fallout of continuing fighting. Prime Minister Imran Khan has categorically stated to play a role in the return of peace in Afghanistan.

The Afghan issue also came under discussion in the in-camera briefing of Parliament's National Security Committee meeting, which was attended by the military and civilian leadership. At the meeting, Pakistan's position to support Afghan-led peace process was reaffirmed and the latest surge in violence was called as internal issue of Afghanistan.

However, the meeting held deliberations to deal with the fallout from any eventuality in Afghanistan. Pakistan shares a 1,600-mile border with Afghanistan, and if the internal fighting continues, many more Afghans are likely to be displaced. Pakistan has already been hosting millions of Afghan refugees for decades, and is ill-prepared to take in any more IDPs.

But still there is a hope that international community and regional countries will push the parties to reach a peace deal in time. Afghanistan needs rebuilding and that can only be possible if there is peace in the country.

Partners in Peace, Not in War



The US security establishment is pinning hopes of a strategic reset on a Pakistan increasingly jittery about a looming civil war next door.

By Umer Farooq

“We can be, and will always remain, partners in peace with America. We can never be partners in conflict anymore,” when Prime Minister Imran Khan made this remark in a speech in the Parliament, he truly reflected the sentiments of Pakistan’s foreign policy and security establishments.

It has been a bumpy ride for Pakistan ever since it became a sidekick of the United States in its so-called War on Terror. The tasks our friends in Washington wanted Islamabad to perform were mostly beyond our capacity and often went against our regional and institutional interests. On the other hand, the Pakistani establishments’ expectations of a payback were much higher than its friends in Washington were ready to deliver. The result was always frustration on both sides and mutual acrimony between the two allies.

In the wake of 9/11 attacks, US Administration put pressure on Pakistan to turn their back on the Afghan Taliban and to provide logistical and intelligence support to US military which was about to invade Afghanistan. The then military government found the situation devoid of any wriggle room and consented instantly and without any deliberations at home or negotiations with the US or our close allies.

At the strategic level, the situation now is fundamentally different from the situation then: While the Taliban and their al Qaeda allies were threatening the mainland America in September 2001, now the Taliban are threatening the Kabul government.

However American response was not different even this time around. Just like September 2001, the US defense officials again came running to Islamabad asking for access to military bases close to the Afghan border so the US forces can continue their counterterrorism operations inside Afghanistan.

It is no coincidence that PM Khan’s speech in the Parliament, in which he once again rejected the idea of giving bases to the US military, came a day after a top US General hinted at launching air strikes against Taliban unless they stop violence immediately. Prime Minister Khan’s unequivocal position that Pakistan would not be a partner in war with United States anymore, is a clear indication that this time around Pakistan’s foreign policy and security establishments perceive enough strategic space for itself not to bow their heads in affirmation to the US demands.

The relationship between two countries, however, involves a large number of

strategic issues and is not restricted to what happens in Afghanistan in the wake of US withdrawal. Although right now, both the countries are focused on how to shape and influence each other’s policy about Afghanistan.

The minimum requirement for the US administration would be that its former ally should give the US military overflight rights so the US Forces can continue their counterterrorism operations in Afghanistan. For its part, the Pakistani government seems to be deeply concerned, even nervous, about continuation of hostilities in Afghanistan, which in their view could devolve into a civil war that could gravely endanger Pakistan’s security and economic stability.

Many of the international and local military and security experts are warning of an impending civil war in Afghanistan as US troops’ withdrawal is almost complete. There are no chances that Taliban will halt its military operations. On the other hand, there are clear indications that forces loyal to the Afghan government will respond. How effective their response will be is another matter.

At present, the Taliban are mostly operating in Northern Afghanistan—close to the border with Central Asian States and

Eastern Afghanistan—close to the border with Pakistan.

Taliban have undergone a transformation of sorts in the preceding three or four years. They have been engaging in diplomatic activity in the capitals of regional countries, especially China, Russia and Iran. Taliban delegations have been engaging in talks with Russian, Chinese and Iranian security officials and diplomats.

One of the issues discussed in these talks is the rise of ISIS in Northern and Eastern Afghanistan. Iran and Russia are particularly very sensitive about the rise of another Sunni militant organization in Afghanistan. Some old Salafi (extremist sect within Sunni Islam) groups based in Eastern Afghanistan have reportedly joined hands with ISIS. Then there are other radical groups rising in Afghanistan, after parting company with the more conservative Taliban.

If Pakistan and other regional countries including China, Russia and Iran give a tacit approval to Taliban's advances at the expense of the government of Ashraf Ghani, the emerging scenario could potentially vitiate Pakistan's relations with Washington.

There are indications that Russia, China and Iran are more concerned about the rise of more radical groups in Northern, Eastern and Western Afghanistan, and they are less concerned about Taliban regaining control of Afghanistan because they view Taliban as less radical than the groups associated with Daesh.

However, the manner in which US Administration has decided to disengage from Afghanistan seems to indicate that now Biden Administration is less fixated on the issues related to terrorism. This will surely result in dwindling strategic importance of Pakistan whose military and intelligence services were providing key strategic assistance to US military in their operations in Afghanistan.

This is clearly reflected in the way US is promoting India as a key player in post-US Afghanistan. Pakistan's security establishment perceives this move of Washington to be highly objectionable for its long time interests in the war torn country.

Former US Ambassador to Pakistan, Richard Olson has recently penned a piece

on Biden administration's Pakistan policy, in which he has described Pakistan as a key to future US engagement in Afghanistan. He, however, has opined that US Administration Pakistan policy will be shaped not by what happens inside Afghanistan, rather it would be shaped by how super power rivalry will develop in the Indo-Pacific region

Says Olson in the piece: "For the Biden administration, the question will be whether it simply accepts as an unpleasant fact that Pakistan has already moved into China's camp or try to compete with China in Pakistan. While Islamabad's strong tilt toward Beijing might be seized upon as an easy way for Washington to get out of a dysfunctional relationship, there are costs: Pakistan is a nuclear weapons state with the world's sixth largest army. That is a lot of combat power to allow simply to fall into a rival's hands.

"Moreover, the United States has historically played an important (if quiet) role in de-escalating Indo-Pakistan conflicts. If the United States entirely gives up its leverage in Islamabad in favor of building influence in Delhi, its ability to play that role will be diminished.

"Since China shows little interest in assuming this responsibility, and in any case will not be perceived by Delhi as an honest broker given that China has its own border conflicts with India, the likelihood of an escalatory cycle getting out of control seems more likely."

On the other hand, Pakistan's powerful military establishment has started to perceive its dwindling strategic importance in the eyes of its sponsors in Washington and as a consequence started to project Pakistan a hub of regional connectivity.

In the words of a US expert, "Pakistan has offered a new approach based on economic security that seeks collaboration with the United States on climate change, technology, and a host of other non-security issues. Translating this new approach into a reality is going to take a lot of work, as Pakistan falls short in keeping its own economic house in order".

Eminent American Foreign Policy expert Wali Nasr has noted that primarily because Pakistan finds itself in difficult economic situation, it will be more prone to change its

strategic course at the behest of Washington "Dwindling foreign aid, dips in labor remittances owing to the collapse of Gulf Cooperation Council economies, and decreases in Pakistan's textile and manufacturing exports have put the country in dire straits", says Nasr.

"Pakistan has long borrowed to finance existing debt. That is no longer possible, and payments on its short- to medium-term debts are converging. Pakistan needs international assistance, preferably via loans and economic aid, and it must grow its exports to boost its economy. The United States should take note that under these circumstances Pakistan will be more open to policy compromises that could provide relief on these fronts".

Nasr goes on to state that Pakistan's political position is not as strong as it used to be when it was vehemently pushing for Islamic causes all around the world. "Saudi Arabia no longer serves as Pakistan's strategic depth. After nearly five decades of close ties, Saudi Arabia is decisively distancing itself from Pakistan. Last year it canceled a three-billion-dollar loan after Islamabad complained about lack of Saudi support for Pakistan over Indian suppression in Kashmir"

And he adds: "It's clear that Saudi Arabia is backing away from its Islamic foreign policy—as reflected in its position on India under the crown prince, who is more openly looking to build economic and strategic ties with the country. The Saudis also did not come to Pakistan's aid over the Kashmir crisis with India. Pakistan, which does not have diplomatic relations with Israel, is feeling isolated as Gulf countries normalize their relationships with the country."

Many in the US capital are predicting that Pakistan's weakening political and economic position will make it malleable to US influence to change its strategic course—a long cherished dream of US security establishment. US strategic experts are giving this advice to the Biden Administration at a time when Biden Administration is busy elsewhere and in no mood to spend an extra penny anywhere except to push its own strategic interests around the world.

Biden's Paradoxical Approach to Military Presence

America's cut-and-run in Afghanistan over Kabul's protestations is as comprehensible as its policy of keeping troops in Iraq in blatant opposition to that country's government.

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

If the United States invaded both Iraq and Afghanistan in the early 2000s on the premise of preventing terrorism or proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, one would expect Washington to take a uniform approach to withdrawing from both these countries. The reality, however, is otherwise.

In Iraq, the Biden administration continues to retain 2,500 troops in contravention of Iraqi Parliament's resolutions and in the absence of an imminent terrorist threat. In Afghanistan, it is down to the feared cut-and-run: Home go the troops whether or not the Taliban negotiate with Kabul or honor any of their prior covenants.

The logic of retention in the absence of terrorism in one country and withdrawals in the presence of a crisis in another is a concern for regional peace with the possibility of a geopolitical confrontation looming large over the Pentagon's subjective and rather unfathomable approach in the Middle East.

In Iraq's case, ideally the assassination of Abu Bakar Al Baghdadi in Barisha in neighboring Syria and the decimation of ISIL should have cleared the way for troop withdrawals based on Washington's stated position of ending wars which has cost millions of dollars.

Yet in the presence of a simmering crisis in Syria, active troop presence in Iraq points at geopolitical motives not grounded in something apart from securing the stability for the Iraqi people. The 2003 invasion to depose Saddam Hussein on mere suspicion of possessing weapons of mass destruction and the toppling of the Baathist regime in Baghdad did not result in troop withdrawals in the absence of terrorism years later.

The fact that this trend is persisting raises an important question: Is the American policy of retaining troops in Iraq in the absence of terrorism meant to promote internal stability or to deter asymmetrical warfare in the Middle East? The latter seems a more plausible explanation.



According to Stephen Zunes, professor of politics at the University of San Francisco, confrontations between the US Air force and Iranian militias intensified after the Trump administration's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA deal in 2018 and has continued with the latest targeting of militias.

Furthermore, the presence of CIA operatives and the targeting of pro-Iranian facilities shows that Washington wishes to negotiate with Tehran while retaining a credible threat in the region for which Iraq is an ideal location.

Such strategies may backfire however, given that in Afghanistan's case, US history with employing Pakistani territory to conduct operations in Afghanistan has now resulted in Islamabad refusing to be drawn into a war that was at one time aimed at rooting out terrorism.

Here lies the notable distinction. In Afghanistan the operations centered on tackling and uprooting terrorism which is now translating into a gross failure with Kabul now confronting harrowing realities of a Taliban takeover and the presence of the Islamic State within its border due to American disengagement.

Yet the absence of the Islamic State in Iraq with active US troop presence is where the duplicity lies. Unlike the Doha Peace Deal of 2020 which excluded the Ashraf Ghani government as a stakeholder, the Iraqi parliament unequivocally voted in 2020 for

US forces to leave the country which the Biden administration has chosen to sideline.

With a Syrian crisis and a defiant Bashar Al Assad regime next door, the only explanation is that the United States has chosen to engage in preventive warfare through deterrence or plausible deniability by using its own proxies to attack Iran's variegated proxies.

This is significant given that Tehran's warm ties with Lebanon, Syria, Iraq and Yemen and its historical role in policymaking could well mean that securing Iraqi stability is a secondary priority for the US. Already, the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has condemned the aerial strikes in the country as a blatant violation of Iraq's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

It is thus clear that the US is taking a hands-on approach in Iraq, in contrast to Afghanistan, where it is withdrawing troops for other geopolitical objectives.

This, combined with the fact that – as Professor Stephen Zunes has astutely remarked – the Biden administration is not hesitant in using force against asymmetrical warfare, could inevitably lead to confrontations. Given the tenuous situation with the ongoing JCPOA negotiations and Iran choosing to enrich uranium due to perceived non-compliance from the US, the situation risks spiraling out of control if the Baghdad policy is not changed.

Knave's Gambit

The Modi-Shah tandem is up to no good in occupied J&K as the Delhi conclave with collaborators of occupation makes clear; time for Pakistan to make its principled stance count.



By Dr Moonis Ahmar

“Our priority is to strengthen grassroots democracy in J&K. Delimitation has to happen at a quick pace so that polls can happen and J&K gets an elected government that gives strength to J&K’s development trajectory.” Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

“Our agenda is restoration of pre-August 5, 2019 status of Jammu & Kashmir.” People’s Democratic Party leader and former Chief Minister of Indian occupied J&K Mehbooba Mufti.

The Delhi meeting on Jammu & Kashmir held on 24 June 2021 and presided by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was not about restoring article 370, which granted special status to J&K or Article 35-A, which provided for the preservation of its demography. It was to offer J&K leaders limited autonomy in managing municipal affairs, holding of assembly elections, delimitation of electoral constituencies and easing of lockdown imposed in the Muslim dominated Valley since 5 August 2019.

As reflected in a group photograph of meeting participants, Delhi meeting depicted how Kashmiri leaders known as collaborators of the occupation congregated with Narendra Modi and Amit Shah to decide about the future of J&K.

Shah, Union Interior Minister and right-hand man of Prime Minister Modi commented on the Delhi meeting in the following words: “We are committed to ensure all round development of J&K... the delimitation exercise and peaceful elections are important milestones in restoring statehood as promised in parliament.”

Upon the demand of Mahbooba Mufti and other leaders of Gupkar alliance for the restoration of Article 370, Prime Minister Modi argued that the matter was pending in the Indian Supreme Court.

Talking to reporters after the meeting, Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad said five demands were put forward during their talks with the Indian Prime Minister: granting of statehood, conducting Assembly elections to restore democracy, rehabilitation of Kashmiri Pandits in Jammu and Kashmir, release of all political detainees and domicile rules.

Overall, the Kashmiri participants termed Delhi meeting cordial and positive – something that should cement their credentials as collaborators of the Indian state against the people of Jammu and Kashmir.

According to Press Trust of India (PTI), the Indian Union Home Secretary Ajay Bhalla contacted leaders of Indian occupied

Jammu and Kashmir and invited them to attend 24 June meeting. Kashmiri leaders approached to attend the meeting included four former chief ministers: Farooq Abdullah and his son Omar Abdullah of the National Conference, senior Congress leader Ghulam Nabi Azad, and PDP chief Mehbooba Mufti.

Also among the invitees were four former deputy chief ministers of the erstwhile state: Congress leader Tara Chand, People’s Conference leader Muzaffar Hussain Baig, and BJP leaders Nirmal Singh and Kavinder Gupta.

Other invitees included CPI (M) leader Mohammed Yusuf Tarigami, Jammu and Kashmir Apni Party (JKAP) chief Altaf Bukhari, Sajjad Lone of the People’s Conference, J-K Congress head G A Mir, BJP’s Ravidner Raina, and Panthers Party leader Bhim Singh.

Conspicuously left out were the leaders of Hurriyat Conference and Jamaat-i-Islami, who have wide following particularly in the Muslim majority Valley of Kashmir, reinforcing the point of view of those questioning the credibility of the huddle.

The meeting Chaired by the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was the first of its kind held after the revocation of Article 370 and 35-A by the Indian parliament on 5

August 2019 under “Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act.”

To what extent was the meeting able to bridge trust deficit between New Delhi and Muslim Kashmiris is open to conjecture. However, it certainly was an attempt to seek legitimacy for the Modi regime in the occupied Jammu & Kashmir.

One sign of success for the Modi regime is the announcement by People's Alliance for Gupkar Declaration to attend June 24 meeting in New Delhi in spite of their resolve to press upon the Modi regime to restore the autonomous status of J&K.

Former Chief Ministers of Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir Mehbooba Mufti of PDP and Farooq Abdullah of National Conference who are part of Gupkar alliance expressed their readiness to participate in the meeting in order to raise their demand for the restoration of pre-5 August 2019 status of J&K.

Both the declarations of the Gupkar Alliance issued in 2019 and 2020 called for protecting the autonomy of Jammu and Kashmir and resistance to unconstitutional delimitation of electoral constituencies.

The Gupkar Alliance was originally composed of seven parties of J&K, viz., National Conference, People's Democratic Party, Communist Party of India (Marxist), Jammu and Kashmir People's Conference, Awami National Conference, Indian National Congress and Jammu & Kashmir People's Movement. However, Congress has since withdrawn from the Alliance according to the 17 November 2020 issue of the New Delhi-based Economic Times.

It is yet to be seen how the Gupkar alliance will influence the Modi regime in reversing Jammu & Kashmir Reorganization Act of 5 August 2019 and to make the lives of millions of Kashmiris particularly in the Valley easier by lifting the lockdown; ending siege and search operations and extrajudicial killings; and reduction of Indian military and paramilitary forces.

Days ahead of the Delhi meeting, Amit Shah held detailed deliberations with the National Security Adviser Aijit Doval and other officials representing security and intelligence agencies looking after the Indian occupied Jammu & Kashmir. The

huddle discussed how to ease restrictions imposed following the 5 August 2019 acts and the implications of the hypothetical restoration of statehood of J&K.

The Delhi meeting was held in the backdrop of two major realities. First, the defiance and resistance of all Kashmiri groups and parties whether belonging to Hurriyat Conference, Jamaat-i-Islami and those who are part of Gupkar alliance against scrapping the special status of Indian Occupied Jammu and Kashmir and bifurcating Jammu & Kashmir and Ladakh as union territories.

Both Mehbooba Mufti and Farooq Abdullah along with his son Omer Abdullah were put under house arrest after 5 August and they categorically rejected the unilateral acts of Modi regime, asserting that the only relationship which Kashmiris had with the Indian Union was article 370 and 35-A.

They argued that with the scraping of these laws, the occupied territory was not bound to maintain their association with Delhi.

But, two years down the road, it seems, there is a rethinking in the minds of PDP and the National Conference leaders to be part of a dialogue with the Modi regime on issues which tend to shape realities in J&K in the post-5 August 2019 scenario. Will Delhi be amenable to the demands of Gupkar alliance or will it not be flexible in terms of restoring the autonomous status of the Indian Occupied J&K?

Second, realizing defiance and resistance by the Muslim population of J&K, particularly in the Valley, the Modi regime is adopting a carrot-and-stick policy. Under the so-called development package for J&K, New Delhi wants to neutralize the segments of Muslim Kashmiris still unamenable to accepting the repeal of Article 370 and 35-A.

A media report the other week said the delimitation commission for Jammu and Kashmir “has kicked off the exercise by writing to all 20 District Commissioners (DC), seeking basic demographic, topographic information as well as the local administration's impressions of political aspirations of the district”.

The commission was set up in February-March 2020 to delineate Assembly and parliamentary constituencies and was given

a year's extension this March. It is only after the completion of the delimitation exercise that elections for the Assembly can be held, although District Development Council (DDC) polls were held last year on earlier patterns based on the 2011 census.

The Modi-Amit Shah combine will certainly press Muslim Kashmiri groups and parties to accept the findings of delimitation commission, which will be imposed on them anyway. In DDC elections held in December 2020, Gupkar Alliance and Congress won majority of seats whereas BJP emerged as a single largest party.

Already, the threat of demographic changes in the Muslim dominated Valley of Kashmir is real and not superficial amidst the issuance of thousands of domicile certificates to non-locals, which will give a lot of confidence to Hindu nationalist BJP-Shiv Sena regime that in coming elections, the results will certainly be in their favor.

At the Delhi meeting, the issue of delimitation of constituencies in both Jammu and the Valley of Kashmir was crucial because Jammu, a non-Muslim majority territory, insists it is more populous than the Valley and in future assembly elections it seems the Muslim majority will diminish.

In two years' time, the issuance of thousands of domicile certificates to non-locals will also have an impact on future elections as the newcomers will be allowed to vote along with the permanent residents of the Valley.

Pakistan needs to seriously monitor the outcome of Delhi meeting and chalk out strategy in case the Modi regime puts it foot down on the autonomous status of the occupied J&K. Any flexibility on the part of Pakistan over the matter of Article 370 or 35-A will compromise Islamabad's principled stance.

Not only that, such weakness will boost Indian efforts to implement the Israeli model of inundating the Palestinian majority occupied West Bank with Jewish settlements which Modi regime wants to replicate in the Muslim majority Valley of Kashmir.

The writer is Meritorious Professor of International Relations and former Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi.

From the Kingdom of Solomon to the State of Israel

How the Jewish people – persecuted for centuries throughout much of the world – became persecutors themselves.

By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

A brief history of Abraham (Ibrahim, PBUH), Patriarch of Peoples of the Book, and his lineage up to King David was narrated in TTI, 15/30 June 2021 edition.

United Monarchy after King Solomon (Suleiman, PBUH), in 930 BCE, split into Dual Monarchy of Judea and Samaria (North of Jerusalem). Samaria also known as Kingdom of Israel was conquered by Assyrians in 722 BCE, and Jews were exiled. Southern Kingdom of Judea was conquered by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar in 586 BCE. Jerusalem and the Temple of Solomon were razed to ground, Jews were massacred, ruling class and nobles were enslaved and taken to Babylon.

Cyrus, the Persian King, conquered Babylonia in 539 BCE, freed the enslaved Jews and financed the rebuilding of the Temple. Ezra (Uzair, PBUH) established worship and rededicated the Temple. Later, in 37 BCE King Herod renovated the temple to its full grandeur.

Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire in 332 BCE, Judea being a province of the Empire also came under the influence of advanced Greek culture and Hellenization of Jews split their society between Hellenized and traditionalist. Hellenized Jews adopted Greek values and considered Judaism old fashioned.

Maccabean revolt broke out between the ruling Hellenized Jews and religious Jews from 67 to 160 BCE. Hellenized Jews were sidelined and an independent Jewish Hasmonean Dynasty rose to power (140 BCE-37 BCE). After Greeks, Romans took control of Judea under General Pompey in 63 BCE. They created a client state and empowered Jewish aristocracy to collect taxes.

In 37 BCE, Herod the Great founded the Herodian dynasty. He was Roman Jew, and the dynasty ruled until 100 CE.

In the first century CE, Jews in the holy land comprised of four groups. Seduces were toadies to Romans, also in-charge of the Temple and hated by common Jews. Pharisees were Rabbis who created charismatic disciple circles. The Zealots were violent extremists. Finally, there were Essenes who resided in Kumran caves. They were pious but voluntarily detached from society, awaiting the Messiah for redemption.

Jesus (Issa, PBUH) whom the Jewish clergy labeled as heretic was crucified in 33 CE. From 66 CE to 135 CE, Jewish-Roman wars continually occurred. In 70 CE, Roman general Titus ransacked Jerusalem, massacred Jews, and destroyed the Temple again. By 135 CE, Romans had expelled most of the Jews from Judea.

Thus began the era of Jewish Diaspora. Sensing the need of the hour, in 200 CE Judah the Prince compiled the oral legal traditions of Torah into written text known as Mishnah.

At that time, major Jewish populations were in Israel and Mesopotamia. Small concentrations (arrived there as slaves) also existed in



Egypt and Italy. Besides Mishnah the other institution which kept Jewish Diaspora intact was Kehillah, a semi-formal structure of community self-governance.

This institution enabled survival in the often-hostile environment, facilitating communal charity and values of communal standards. Kehillah at one time was practiced from Black Sea to the Baltic. Babylonian Talmud, a detailed commentary on Mishnah, was written in 500 AD.

Jewish Diaspora came under influence of two civilizations, Christianity and Islam. Both Judaism and Islam have practice-oriented laws and have far more in common than either has with Christianity, which was a creed based very little on written laws. Muslim societies were law based and Jews were comfortable with that.

The golden age of Muslim Spain (10-12th century) was the greatest example of cooperative rather than confrontational living between Muslims, Christians and Jews. The Jewish community excelled in scholarship, philosophy, medicine, poetry, diplomacy etc., even warfare. One Talmud Jew scholar, a poet, even rose to the rank of general in the Muslim army.

But after 12th century under Almohad Dynasty privileges of Jews were reduced. Further decline of Muslim Spain at the hands of Iberian Christians brought hardships for the Jews. In 1391, Spanish Inquisition began. Jews were forcibly baptized and then tortured to check their faith. Those found unfaithful would be further tortured to reveal other crypto-Jews (fake Christians).

Failure of the inquisition policy resulted in mass expulsion of Jews that continued from 1478 until the 19th century. Exiled Jews took refuge in southern France, Germany, and North Africa.

Spanish Jews were the world's most talented and financially sound lot in the fifteenth century. The Ottoman Sultan welcomed these Jews with open arms and even gave them abode in Northern Israel.

Jews under Christianity faced great hardships. During the Crusades, Jews seen as friends of Muslims were killed in many places in Europe. The pathetic plight of Jewish Diaspora in the

Christendom was portrayed by Christianity as the deserved lot of people who rejected the Messiah.

Jews in Europe were made to wear a yellow badge or dunce hats as marks of identity. In many places, the head of the Jewish community was to present himself to Mayor of the town to receive an annual slap in the face.

Since interest was not permitted in Christianity, and Jews could charge interest from non-Jews, hence they flourished as moneylenders facilitated by their international footprint. Jews did not indulge with land ownership. They developed skills of urban utility and adopted cash oriented activities.

Moneylending had its own risks, if the debtors were powerful and unable or unwilling repay the loans, moneylenders were expelled – as often happened in England. Debt accumulation of peasants en masse resulted in peasant uprising. Hence Jewish moneylenders were victims of hatred all the time.

Inquisition and expulsion from Spain resulted in a dramatic shift in gender power among displaced Jews. Women took positions of authority in the community. Persecution of Jews over generations led to the development of secular living for safety. However, the introduction of printing press, European enlightenment and technological progress adversely effected the community centric life style of Jews.

During the seventeenth century, landed aristocracy of Poland and Lithuania invited Jews for minting coins, moneylending and tax farming, a practice where landowners leased land to the tax collectors for an annual sum. Jews were also given exclusive rights to produce and sell alcohol. Poor farmers would come to stay in Jewish-owned inns, drink alcohol on credit, and even get money from the lenders.

Jews were seen as implementers of heavy taxation as well as a source of debt burden by the poor farmers. Cossack upheavals against landowners would turn towards the Jewish tax collectors. Such upheavals forced the Jewish community to emigrate again.

Russian Czar Nicolas I wished a third of Jews will migrate, second third will assimilate and the rest will die. For Jews, he lowered the conscription age to 12 years and instituted six year for training and 25 years compulsory military service, expecting them to assimilate as Russian.

France in 1791 offered emancipation to Jews with full rights of citizenship. Jews rose to the occasion, entered universities and excelled in higher learning to gain respectability. Community living was replaced by a lifestyle based on the French ideals of liberty, equality, and fraternity. Now the Jews could become part of mainstream culture and economy.

In Germany, Jews struggled for emancipation for an entire century. While adapting to the German way of life, Jews tried to preserve Jewishness as well. Germans equated Semitism with domination of Europe by the world Jewry; hence, anti-Semitism was a badge of honor. Nazis saw Jews as Germany's misfortune.

By the end of 19th century, Jews were facing small pogroms in

Eastern Europe and Russia, and the Russian government did not offer any protection.

In the age of modernity, Jews are said to have devised five strategies to get rid of perpetual humiliation they were facing: i) Emigration, ii) Zionism, iii) Socialism, iv) Diaspora Nationalism, v) Renewed traditionalism.

Between 1881 and 1917, Eastern European Jews emigrated en masse to USA, Canada, South America, South Africa, Western Europe, Australia and the Middle East. The Zionists concluded that every emigration ends up in another expulsion. Their solution to the problem was a return to Zion, their final destination. In Eastern Europe, it was a religious movement, but later in Western Europe, under Theodore Herzl, it became secular.

Socialist Jews recognized the vicious cycle of emigration and expulsion but argued going to Zion would mean facing malaria and other diseases. Thus, it is said, they decided to change the parameters of their very existence by creating a universal classless society with no boundaries and no conflicts.

Diaspora nationalists were nostalgic for the time spent in Lithuania & Poland, and advocated a return to community living under Kehillah.

Renewed traditionalists' rabbinic leadership was against all the above options. They professed entering politics to make Jewish voice heard in native communities.

In WWI, Jews were on all sides of the conflict, serving the country they resided in. In WWII, German Jews faced Holocaust. It had three basic stages.

- ▶ Stage 1, ostracism: Define who is a Jew, if all four grandparents are German Aryans, they are pure blooded. If any grandparent is Jew, they go to gas chamber.
- ▶ Stage 2, place restrictions on Jews. In 1939, Jews were put in ghettos (e.g. in Warsaw) and in concentration camps.
- ▶ Stage 3, extermination. During the invasion of Russia, Germans machine gunned Jews in Lithuania and buried them in mass graves. In Germany, rat poison was used to kill Jews. Then the factories of death were erected where mass killing of Jews took place in gas chambers.

During those trying times, a pressing need arose to open the borders of Palestine for mass emigration of the persecuted Jews from German occupied Europe. In 1947, the United Nations partitioned Palestine into States of Israel and Palestine. Israel accepted the plan and Arabs rejected it. A civil war broke out.

By 1949, Jews took over more land than was given by UN and signed an armistice with Arabs. In the three years following the war, about 700,000 Jews emigrated to Israel from Europe and Arab lands while an equal number of Palestinians were expelled from their homeland.

The State of Israel now follows the Talmudic injunction: If someone is trying to kill you, wake up before him and kill him.

German Chancellor: She Earned Tons of Respect Not Money



TTI Report

Germans gave a very warm farewell to their favourite and great leader Angela Merkel, Vice-Chancellor of Germany, who handed over leadership to her party. With six minutes of warm applause, on the streets, balconies, windows, the whole Country applauded for 6 minutes – spectacular example of leadership and defense of humanity, chapeaux!

Germans elected her to lead them, and she led 80 million Germans for 18 years with competence, skill, dedication and sincerity. She did not utter nonsense. Today Germany is the 4th largest economy in the world and the largest economy in Europe. Angela Merkel's 18 years rule changed the destiny of her people and Germany as well. She did not appear in the alleys of Berlin to be photographed. She was dubbed "The Lady of the World" and who was described as the equivalent of six million men. During these eighteen years of her leadership of the authority in her Country, no transgressions were recorded against her. She did not assign any of her relatives to a government post. She did not claim that she was the maker of glories. She did not get millions in payment, nor did anyone cheer her

performance, she did not receive charters and pledges, she did not fight those who preceded her.

Merkel left the party leadership position and handed it over to those after her, and Germany and it's German people are in the best condition ever.

The reaction of the Germans was unprecedented in the history of the Country. The entire population went out to their balconies of their houses and clapped for her spontaneously for 6 continuous minutes. A standing ovation nationwide. Germany stood as one body bidding farewell to their leader, a chemical physicist who was not tempted by the fashion or the lights and did not buy real estate, cars, yachts and private planes, knowing that she is from former East Germany.

She left her post after leaving Germany at the top. She left and her relatives did not claim advantage. Eighteen years and she never changed her wardrobe. God be upon this silent leader.

At a press conference, a female Journalist asked Merkel: We notice that you're

wearing the same suit, don't you have any other? She replied: "I am a government employee and not a model"

At another press conference, they asked her: Do you have housemaids who clean your house, prepare your meals and so on? Her answer was: "No, I do not have servants and I do not need them. My husband and I do this work at home every day. Then another journalist asked: Who is washing the clothes, you or your husband? Her answer: "I arrange the clothes, and my husband is the one who operates the washing machine, and it is usually at night, because electricity is available and there is no pressure on it, and the most important thing is to take into the account the possible inconvenience for the neighbours, thankfully the wall separating our apartment from the neighbours is thick. She said to them, "I expected you to ask me about the successes and failures in our work in the government?"

Mrs. Merkel lives in a normal apartment like any other citizen. She lived in this apartment before being elected Chancellor of Germany. She did not leave it and does not own a villa, servants, swimming pools or gardens.

The Taming of the Politicians

After remaining at one another's throats for nearly three years, the government and opposition are suddenly the civillest of partners. What gives?



By Khalid Wasim

Pakistan's political culture seems to have undergone a makeover of the most mysterious kind. Everybody knows the magical change came about amid the budget session, and that it propagated overnight. But that is about all the great majority of Pakistanis will ever know.

Amazed and perplexed, the chattering classes are speculating to their hearts' content – and truly, there is so much to speculate about: What prompted the opposition to facilitate the government in the passage of the budget in the National Assembly?

Even more perplexing, what made them agree to discuss electoral reforms – something that was anathema to them days ago? And Imran Khan – has Imran Khan finally climbed down from the container? And finally, the obvious question: Who brokered government-opposition truce?

The origins of the magical change go back to the budget session. The predictions by some political pundits that getting the Federal Budget 2021-22 through the Parliament would be a challenging task for the three-year-old Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government fell flat as the opposition allowed the government to breeze the budget through the National Assembly.

During this session, the cricketer-turned-politician got an opportunity to deliver a speech on the floor of the assembly without noises for the first time despite presence of the opposition members.

It was very unusual for the journalists and political observers, who have been covering the proceedings of the present assembly since its inception in August 2018, to see nearly 80 opposition members quietly listen to their prime minister for about 90 minutes like well-behaved children.

Perhaps the opposition members had reciprocated the similarly tame behaviour of the treasury members during more than two-hour long opening budget speech of Opposition Leader and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) President Shehbaz Sharif on 17 June. And they did so after disrupting the proceedings of the assembly continuously for three days to prevent the opposition leader from opening up the budget debate.

It was the day when the opposition, which had previously declared that it would not hold any negotiations with the government and would not attend any meeting under Speaker Asad Qaiser, all of a sudden reached an agreement to ensure smooth proceedings during the budget session.



Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry, who had categorically stated only two days ago that they would not let the opposition members speak in the house, come what may, during a news conference made the announcement regarding the government-opposition patch-up, admitting that the last three days' incidents had damaged the parliament's sanctity and brought bad name for the politicians.

Later, disclosing the agreement points, the speaker on the floor of the assembly announced that the two sides had agreed that they would listen to the speeches from both the sides with patience and would not pass personal remarks against each other's leadership.

And then two sides took a number of CBMs (confidence building measures). The speaker lifted the ban he had imposed on the entry of seven members, including three from the opposition, for their unruly behaviour in the house. And the opposition immediately withdrew a no trust motion which they had submitted hours after the bulldozing of the legislations by the government in the assembly on June 10.

For the budget session, the Speaker issued production orders for Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) stalwart Syed Khursheed Shah and Ali Wazir, the independent MNA from the erstwhile Federally Administered Tribal Areas (FATA) who has the backing of the Pashtun Tahaffuz Movement (PTM).

Both the leaders made speeches, but they remained mostly confined to the budget and did not make any controversial, harsh or political comment despite the fact that both were attending the session after a long and considerable time.

A subdued Sharif in his speech did not make any personal comment against the prime minister and the latter also reciprocated it in his unusual speech on 30 June when he made no attack on the PML-N and the PPP leaders and did not call them chor, daku and mafia.

In fact, he made a direct offer to the opposition parties to have a dialogue on the government-proposed electoral reforms, including the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) in the elections, the right of vote to the overseas Pakistanis, and allowing the dual nationals to conditionally contest the elections.

After this speech, some political observers said that Imran Khan had finally come down from his famous D-Chowk container.

The opposition parties, which had been vigorously opposing the government's move to bring changes to the election laws and had refused to become a part of the Parliamentary Committee on Electoral Reforms, had recently forwarded names of their members to the speaker for inclusion in the committee.

The PML-N which had taken a hard-line stance on the issue than the other parties had also given the names to the speaker. The committee is now expected to become functional after Eid.

Similarly, the opposition parties which had previously on two occasions had boycotted the meetings of the Parliamentary Committee on National Security under the speaker also fully participated in its meeting on 1 July in which Army Chief Gen Qamar

Javed Bajwa and Director-General Inter-Service Intelligence (ISI) Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed briefed the parliamentarians on the possible regional situation with reference to the US decision to withdraw its troops from the war-torn Afghanistan by 11 September this year.

The opposition were so much obliged to the ruling PTI for allowing them to deliver rhetoric speeches in the assembly that they gave the government a virtual walkover and put up no resistance at any stage of the budget approval.

Shehbaz Sharif did not return to the house after delivering his opening speech and Bilawal Bhutto Zardari also preferred his political engagements in Azad Kashmir than his presence in the assembly during the budget session.



On the day of the final passage of the budget, however, Bilawal and his ailing father Asif Zardari remained present in the house for quite some time, although Shehbaz Sharif was conspicuous by his absence.

A confident-looking Prime Minister Imran Khan attended the proceedings for only 50 minutes and left the assembly hall even before final vote on the budget after realising that his presence was no more required in the house to ensure the presence of the treasury members who had clearly outnumbered the opposition.

The prime minister entered the assembly hall at a time when the chair had already ordered a headcount on the demand of the opposition on the motion moved by Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin to take up the finance bill for consideration and final vote. The motion was approved with 172-138 votes. The number of votes — 172 — polled in support of the motion is exactly the minimum number of votes required by the prime minister to get a confidence vote from the 342-member house.

According to the party position in the 342-member National Assembly, the opposition parties have 163 members, which means that 25 opposition members were absent from the crucial proceedings. A majority of the absent members belonged to the PML-N as the PPP had ensured presence of its maximum members, claiming that only two of its MNAs were not able to attend the sitting.

It was miraculous to see the two sides agreeing to a peaceful coexistence as it happened just days after the PTI and the opposition members were at each other's throats.



The speaker had also announced that the government had agreed to constitute a special bipartisan parliamentary committee to review the legislations that had been passed by it in haste on June 10. The next day, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Babar Awan categorically declared that they would not withdraw any of the bills in question. But, surprisingly there was no reaction from the opposition.

Now the questions arise:

1. How did this U-turn come about and who brokered the deal?
2. Who will benefit from it politically? And
3. Is this truce permanent?

Let's try to find the answers in reverse order, starting from Question 3.

Many political experts are of the view that there are chances that this is a permanent truce and it will last till the next elections which, according to them, can be announced before the scheduled time in 2023. They believe that the opposition parties, particularly the PML-N, have agreed to provide Imran Khan complete freedom and an opportunity to show his political abilities and deliver on his promises.

After making a failed attempt from the platform of now the almost defunct Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) to oust the present regime through street power, the PML-N leaders are now of the view that Imran Khan has already completed three years of his term and they need to tolerate him only for one more year as in the fifth and last year, every party will be focused on the upcoming elections. The party does not want to see Imran becoming a "political martyr" at this stage through early dismissal of his government.

In return, these experts say, the PML-N has already started getting relief in the cases against its leaders, some of whom, including Shehbaz Sharif, Hamza Shehbaz, Khawaja Asif and Ahsan Iqbal, have already been released on bail. The National Accountability Bureau (NAB) has already gone slow in the cases against the opposition leaders, including Maryam Nawaz, Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, Rana Sanaullah and Miftah Ismail.

And remember, we have not heard anything like Vote Ko Izzat Do from London for a long time. The opposition also seems to be no more interested in asking NAB to proceed against Jahangir Tareen in the alleged sugar scam and the issue has largely subsided.

Now, let's find the answer to Question No. 2:

Apparently, it seems that the situation is beneficial for both the government and the opposition, though it is more beneficial for Imran Khan as he is in power. However, these benefits are short-term in nature for both of them.

If Imran Khan wants to complete the rest of his tenure without any problem, he will have to compromise on his party's trademark slogan of "accountability", which he has already started.

Similarly, the anti-establishment image which the PML-N had managed to build for itself over the last three years, has now started getting tarnished amid reports that the party has struck a backdoor deal with the very forces which were the target of criticism of the PML-N leaders "for their role in politics and election manipulation."

Background interviews with a number of senior PML-N leaders reveal that the same feeling prevails among many party members and workers. A senior PML-N parliamentarian while talking to this scribe on condition of anonymity said this sudden change in the party policy had damaged the party as the workers were also perturbed over it.

"We become revolutionists and start challenging undemocratic forces and then all of a sudden, we become totally subdued and offer all our services to the same powers," said a PML-N leader who was once among the close confidants of party's supreme leader Nawaz Sharif.

Even PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari in his recent speech in Azad Kashmir in connection with the election campaign in the valley shredded PML-N's duality towards the establishment. Addressing the PPP supporters in Abbaspur, he persistently upbraided the PML-N for "giving space to the PTI governments in the centre and Punjab".

The answer to Question No. 1 is obvious and known to everyone having a political instinct and who has been following the country's politics events for decades. It is said that the government and the opposition members made the truce agreement at the Speaker's Chamber in the presence of a low cadre official from a "sensitive institution."





No Clear Winner Expected in AJK Election

Pakistan's strategic interest dictate that the electoral process in Kashmir be free, fair, and transparent.



By Wajih Safarish Khan

Elections for forty-five directly elected seats of Legislative Assembly of Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) will be held on 25 July 2021.

Of the total 724 candidates in the fray, 579 are vying for the 33 AJK seats while 145 are tussling for twelve Legislative Assembly seats reserved for refugees from Indian held parts of the state and those uprooted by the construction of Mangla Dam and presently based in Pakistan.

Eight indirectly elected seats, including five reserved for women, will be filled later through those elected from above mentioned seats.

Of the total of 3.2 million voters for the LA election, 2,817,090 (including 1,590,347 male and 1,297,743 female voters) are from 33 seats based in Azad Kashmir while the rest are from 12 refugee seats spread all over Pakistan.

Four seats in the legislative assembly were added in 2018 through thirteenth constitutional amendment in the AJK Interim Constitution in 2018. As a result districts of Neelum, Muzaffarabad, Rawalakot and Kotli got one additional seat in the assembly.

In Pakistan elections for National and Provincial Assemblies are held within two months following the end of tenure of the sitting assembly and neutral caretaker government is installed to oversee the elections. However in AJK, like other parliamentary democracies across the world elections for new assembly are held within two months preceding the end of tenure of the sitting Assembly. The existing government continues during the time. Thus since 1991 elections for the AJK assembly were always held in month of July every fifth year and new government assumes office in following August.

Historically Jammu and Kashmir Muslim Conference has been dominant political party in the territory and Pakistan Muslim League always supported it as its branch in AJK. However rift between Sardar Abdul Qayyum Khan and Sardar Sikandar Hayat Khan resulted in major group seceding from the party establishing Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz in AJK. The party had won 31 out of 41 seats in 2016 state elections and has been ruling there under Raja Farooq Haider Khan.

As already stated, PMLN won 31 of the 41 directly elected seats in last elections. It

then polled 739195 votes while its main opponent PPP got 352742 votes and won only three seats while Muslim Conference polled less than half of PPP tally but got same number of seats. PTI polled 211887 votes and won two seats.

The main contest this time around too is between PMLN, PPP and PTI. Muslim Conference may emerge as other main group and may play important role in case there is no clear winner.

Historically, the party ruling Pakistan has always won in AJK. The 1985 election was not party-based, yet Gen Zia's favoured Muslim Conference won. In 1990, the PPP, which was ruling Pakistan won the election despite facing stiff resistance for refugee seats from the Punjab the Nawaz Sharif's PML-N was in power.

Soon the government in Islamabad was ousted. The new government made it unbearable for PPP's Mumtaz Rathore to continue as AJK Prime Minister. He dissolved the Assembly and IJI supported Muslim Conference won hands down.

Again, in 1996, the PPP was in power in Islamabad 1996 and won the election installing Chaudhry Sultan Mehmood as



Prime Minister and later Sardar Ibrahim Khan as President.

Muslim conference switched to Musharraf's side in 2001 and was able to get Sardar Qayyum Khan elected as Prime Minister for yet another stint in power. An unknown Sardar Anwar retired from the army as major general and became the new President within no time.

In 2006 both Muslim conference and PPP were fragmented. Sardar Hayat Khan separated from Sardar Qayyum Khan and formed his own group while Choudhary Sultan Mehmood separated from PPP and formed his own party. No one got majority in a four way contest. The fragmented house changed Prime Ministers five times in as many years.

In 2011 PPP's federal government in Islamabad was able to get its own man in Muzaffarabad, a feat PMLN repeated in 2016 and PTI hopes to pull off this time round.

The federal government's administrative and police control over AJK, its ability to employ financial resources available to it by virtue of its control over Kashmir Council and its ability to spend or make promises in this regard help it get its supporters elected in AJK.

The twelve seats meant for refugees from the Indian held parts of the state currently

living in Pakistan and those who were uprooted from their homes due to construction of Mangla Dam are another big leverage in the hands of federal government. Almost nine of twelve of them fall in Punjab.

These seats, especially those for refugees from Anantnag, Baramulla and Muzaffarabad have very small number of voters and are spread in large territories. This makes it easier for party ruling Punjab to buy or bully the voters to get its supporters elected. The same holds true for seats other provinces.

The Opposition is already accusing the ruling PTI of using unfair means in the upcoming election. Many leaders from other parties, especially PML-N, have switched sides. AJK election commission too has written to Prime Minister Imran Khan to complain against use of resources of federal and provincial governments of Pakistan to influence voters in AJK.

How much of an impact the letter will have on the attitude of the federal government remains to be seen. Meanwhile, Prime Minister Imran Khan himself is scheduled to hold election rallies in different cities of AJK during coming days.

How far the rallies will comply with the code of conduct for elections which the

AJK Election Commission in its letter to Prime Minister has referred to will be good case to study.

The three heavyweight parties are running spirited campaigns in Azad Kashmir. The PPP's Bialwal Bhutto Zardari has already made two visits to Azad Kashmir and addressed rallies. He is scheduled to carry out another extended tour closer to polling day.

The PMLN's Maryam Nawaz Sharif is already in Muzaffarabad and other leaders will join her soon. As already stated, Prime Minister Imran Khan will also address election rallies.

When all is said and done, there is not much to pick a winner for the election as yet. In the likeliest scenario, there will be none and the spoils will be divided among the three and no party will be able to form the government on its own.

Whatever the outcome of the election, Pakistan's strategic interest dictate that the electoral process be free, fair, and transparent to showcase a free, democratic, and independent Kashmir in contrast with the Indian occupied part of the state. This places additional responsibility on ruling PTI and Prime Minister Imran to ensure there are no accusations of unfair tactics or political engineering during the exercises.





The Match Losing Potential of Wasim Akram Plus

Owing to the lacklustre performance of the Buzdar government, Imran Khan's PTI has all but lost Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan.

By Ahmad Waleed

No political dispensation can rule Pakistan without first having a firm grip of Punjab, the most populous province of Pakistan; and no political party can lay claim to prime ministership without winning big in Punjab, the province with most National Assembly seats.

And yet, Prime Minister Imran Khan seems content to leave the country's decisive political bastion to the shenanigans of Usman Buzdar, a political neophyte who had no credentials to start with and has doggedly refused to grow on the job.

"Punjab is slipping through our hands," remarked a federal minister of Pakistan Tehreek Insaaf (PTI) government a couple of months ago when asked if he is personally satisfied with the performance of their party government in the largest province of the country. Majority of party bigwigs and local leaders express similar view. They believe the party has failed to perform under Chief Minister Usman Buzdar.

But, only Prime Minister Imran Khan insists his choice 'Wasim Akram Plus' is perhaps the best chief minister the Punjab province ever had in the history. And he openly brags about that since his nomination in 2018.

Usman Buzdar is still learning while the ballot box reposed full confidence in the ousted Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's PML-N in the recent by-elections. "We are happy and relaxed over the performance of the incumbent government of PTI. We will never try to bring down the Buzdar government as it suits us," said one of the PML-N leaders.

What's wrong with the Punjab government's performance? Why it could not outpace the 'speed' of the previous chief minister, Shahbaz Sharif?

Over the last three decades, there has been a buzz in the political and non-political circles that Shahbaz Sharif is a good administrator. What did Imran Khan think when he placed Usman Buzdar in Punjab ignoring his

stalwarts and started calling him his 'Wasim Akram Plus' even before Usman Buzdar could learn the ropes of the job?

Some PTI leaders believe Imran Khan had thought he will remotely run the province from Islamabad since he (Imran Khan) is a self-proclaimed know-everything 'genius' who would magically bring about a major change in all the departments.

But that did not happen, lament his party leaders. "Now we have come to the conclusion that the party will be wiped out in the Punjab province because the dismal state of affairs," one of the party leaders remarked.

From big budget lapses in the development sector through the last three years to frequent shuffles in the bureaucracy to failing to bring about meaningful reforms in education and police departments, the Punjab government has been criticised for showing no results against the tall claims of making Pakistan corruption free and lifting the standard of life of every common man. Instead, rising inflation and joblessness have made people's lives miserable.

Fawad Chaudhry, the federal information minister, is one of the major critics of his own government in Punjab. He believes after the 18th Amendment, it is up to the provincial governments to show performance to help win the next elections. He thinks if the provinces do not come up to the expectations of the masses, the PTI will not be able to win the next elections.

Not only do some federal ministers who speak openly or during the background chats hitting their own government, the estranged MPs, electables and the allies like PML-Q miss no opportunity to hold their own partners in the government responsible for the chaotic economic situation and rising inflation in the country. After all, they have to contest next elections and bag some seats for future coalitions.

The infighting within the PTI in Punjab has led to propping up of several groups in the



party which has become a major challenge for the already struggling Punjab government. Now, the last ditch efforts are being made to win back the estranged electables and allies like PML-Q by doling out huge development funds in the budget 2021-2022.

The party has also realised to some extent that their focus has been the southern part of the province while the central Punjab and Lahore have been ignored intentionally or unintentionally. This the government has earmarked some projects for Lahore as well since only one underpass at the Firdous Market was built in recent years.

Before the budget was approved by the Cabinet, one aide to the CM advised him to set aside a special development package for Lahore too as the capital is the hub of national media which is already highly critical of the Punjab government.

The three years have passed and PTI in Punjab has been labelled as a 'failure' by not only the opposition but also by the voters who have rejected the PTI in Punjab. The results of the recent by-elections are a proof.

Another very close aide of the prime minister observed that the PM is preoccupied with the affairs of nations and international levels. "How can he remotely run a province? I believe this is the major problem that has affected the provinces of Punjab and KP," he said.

"This will be the last year of the government to show progress. Otherwise, we are destined for doom," a senior member of the government recently said.

Of Pakistan, FATF, and International Coercion

The IMF is a key instrument of political and economic coercion under the Bretton-Woods system. Why should its Financial Action Task Force be any different?



By Mehtab Haider

International scholars of high politics have time and again pointed out the IMF – a central pillar of the Bretton-Woods system – as an instrument of the political and economic coercion. It is also a common knowledge that the United States is the country with the greatest leverage over the IMF.

For instance, although the IMF's stated decision-making procedures prohibit the consideration of the political factors, we have seen that political friends of the US are more likely to receive loans than are its political foes.

It is well known that on occasions, US administration went to pressuring the Fund to approve loans for politically friendly countries, disregarding the Fund's economic criteria – or to deny loans for the economically worthy countries politically opposed by the US.

Pakistan's experience with the Fund's Financial Action Task Force (FATF) is turning into a case study of how this child organization of the IMF is every bit a chip off the old block. Late last month, FATF decided to keep Pakistan

in its grey list, and handed the country a second action plan to implement in order to avoid falling into the blacklist.

First of all, there is a need to understand that Pakistan had to face a unique situation never experienced by any other country around the globe in the context that two different processes were run. In case of Pakistan; simultaneously and Islamabad, had to face another action plan when it reached close to delivering on the first plan.

Pakistan was placed in the grey list back in June 2018 when the FATF showed dissatisfaction over the country's compliance to its Anti-Money Laundering and Counter Financing of Terrorism (AML/CFT) protocols. Islamabad was given one-year timeframe to implement 27 action plans to come out of the grey list amid a time of the political transition happening in the country as the Pakistan Muslim League (N) was completing its five-year tenure.

An interim government soon took over, its mandate was limited to holding the general election in the

country. In addition, the action plans required legislation; something the interim government was ill equipped to accomplish given no national assembly existed at the time. As would be expected, the caretaker government could not deliver much on this count and the buck stopped with the Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf when it took reins of power in August 2018.

Soon afterwards, a regional affiliate of FATF body known as Asia Pacific Group (APG) also selected Pakistan for Mutual Evaluation Report (MER) in 2019. Thus, a second process was launched while the first action plan of 27 points was still under implementation. Pakistan's MER was due in 2019 after a pause of five years since the previous MER in 2014.

Two parallel processes were now in motion over the objections from Pakistan, arguing that one of the processes should halt until the completion of the other. Pakistani authorities have complained of discrimination on several occasions.

Being an IMF's program, FATF is inevitably intertwined with the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan. What is more, the overall geopolitical and geo-economic situation of the region has its own implications for overall developments happening in this region. There is a feeling in Islamabad that the United States is using the threat of FATF blacklisting as a Damocles' sword hanging over Pakistan to coerce the country's leadership into doing Washington's bidding.

This is not to say we do not need to put our house in order. On the contrary, we need to grab this opportunity to squeeze out any non-state actors benefiting from our lax AML/CFT regime. This how we can turn a challenge into an opportunity to improve Pakistan's long-term security and stability.

One thing must be crystal clear that Pakistan could not afford violating United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions 1267 and 1373 related to money laundering and curbing terror financing because the FATF, a watchdog, was monitoring to comply with these two resolutions. The violations of UNSCRs could lead towards imposing economic sanctions in worst scenario.

Now in recently held plenary meeting held at Paris, Pakistan was found largely compliant on 26 out of 27 action plans but at the same time, Islamabad was found compliant on 34 recommendations out of a total of 40 tabled for all jurisdictions by FATF.

The FATF's regional body APG reported to FATF's plenary about overall performance and progress report on 40 recommendations and the plenary came up with fresh six-points action plan. A determination was also made to require Pakistan's compliance on both these action plans in order to come out from the grey list.

"Pakistan will be delisted from grey list on implementing both action plans and accomplishing on-site visits," the FATF President Marcus Pleyer told journalists in the online briefing after the Paris plenary.

The FATF conceded that since June 2018, when Pakistan made a high-level political commitment to working with the FATF and APG to strengthen its AML/CFT regime and to address its strategic counter-terrorist financing-related deficiencies,

Pakistan's continued political commitment has led to significant progress across a comprehensive CFT action plan.

The FATF recognizes Pakistan's progress and efforts to address these CFT action plan items and notes that since February 2021, Pakistan has made progress to complete two of the three remaining action items on demonstrating that effective, proportionate, and dissuasive sanctions are imposed for TF convictions. It also acknowledges that Pakistan's targeted financial sanctions regime is being used effectively to target terrorist assets.

The FATF conceded that Pakistan has now completed 26 of the 27 action items in its 2018 action plan. The FATF encourages Pakistan to continue to make progress to address as soon as possible the one

together to iron out most of those issues. Still ahead is the critical part of implementation, requiring Islamabad to cooperate with other countries under mutual legal assistance arrangements to ensure compliance on international cooperation.

And yet, the country was handed a new six-point plan of action and left to languish on the grey list, under the threat of being put on the blacklist. Observers say Pakistan will remain on the grey list for at least another year – by which time it may come under pressure to appease some powerful patrons of FATF in some way or the other.

Next door to Pakistan, the US-led international coalition is pulling out troops, bringing the two decades long to an end. Could Pakistan being a good boy in the post-war Afghanistan figure into the calculus? Who



remaining CFT-related item by demonstrating that TF investigations and prosecutions target senior leaders and commanders of UN designated terrorist groups.

In response to additional deficiencies later identified in Pakistan's 2019 APG Mutual Evaluation Report (MER), Pakistan has made progress to address a number of the recommended actions in the MER and provided further high-level commitment in June 2021 to address these strategic deficiencies pursuant to a new action plan that primarily focuses on combating money laundering.

Regarding the MER, the APG had initially identified 100 deficiencies. Pakistan's military and political leadership worked

knows? On the other hand, could the United States at some point lean on the FATF to let Pakistan off the hook? Why not?

Meanwhile, Pakistan would do well to get its act together to implement all remaining conditions of the FATF. Although the process can seem cumbersome, documentation of the economy is ultimately in the larger interest of the country.

On the other hand, after making progress on technical, legislative, and enforcement fronts, Pakistan may still need a wink here or a nod there from powerful friends. Powerful friends are always good to have, and Islamabad must master the high art of making powerful friends – and making up with them when they are cross.

Pakistan's Strong Recovery Outpaces World Bank's Assessment

That Pakistan was able to beat the World Bank projections for the last fiscal by a wide margin means we stand an equally good chance of beat their prognostications for the next.

By Javed Mahmood

In recent months the economy of Pakistan has shown strong and encouraging signs of recovery and growth that has stunned many in the country and abroad. Almost all the key economic indicators have demonstrated encouraging growth in 2021.

Remittances, exports, current account balance, stock exchange, large scale manufacturing sectors, ecommerce, banks' lending at low markup and dollar-rupee exchange rate have indicated a significant growth in 2020-21. All these developments would lead to further economic growth to 4.8 percent in the current financial year 2021-22.

The national economy grew by 3.9 percent growth over the fiscal year 2020-21, a year for which the World Bank had projected a mere 1.3 percent growth amid the Covid-19 running riot economic activity returning at a slow pace. But Pakistan's economy outpaced this projection on the back of strong production, consumption, and exports in the latter half of the year (June-Dec 2020).

Interestingly, the World Bank estimated 2.7 percent growth for the fiscal year 2022-23. The World Bank also stated that the private consumption has picked up over July to December 2020, in part due to the record increase in workers' remittances, social assistance support from the Ehsaas program, the government's construction package, and a return to pre-COVID mobility levels from September 2020. Investment is also estimated to be recovering as machinery imports and cement sales both recorded double-digit growth rates during this period.

The World Bank's Country Director for Pakistan Najy Benhassine said: "It is crucial to sustain the positive reform momentum to continue to boost the competitiveness of Pakistan's economy and lay a strong foundation for a more robust, inclusive and sustainable recovery.



"Increasing competitiveness and stimulating private investment and exports will require continued macroeconomic stability, maintenance of a market-determined exchange rate, and improving the business environment to enable all firms, particularly SMEs, to access markets and compete openly in a leveled playing field. The potential for a strong recovery and a growth acceleration is there. Reforms to make it happen need to be further sustained."

He, however, noted that given the scope and magnitude of the COVID-19 crisis, understanding how the pandemic affected Pakistan's private sector will be key to informing the design of new policy measures or refining existing ones to prevent widespread long-term firm closures and job losses.

Derek Chen, World Bank Senior Economist for Pakistan also said: "Despite some recovery in the private sector, many firms remain vulnerable and require support to prevent closures and further job losses. Policy measures that prevent permanent firm closures and further job losses will contribute significantly to sustaining the recovery."

He said that the policy measures to consider include enhancing private sector access to

formal finance, in particular for micro, small, and medium enterprises; streamlining regulatory and administrative requirements to ease compliance costs; and supporting firms in digitizing and establishing an online presence.

For the first time, Pakistan's exports reached a new high point in 2020-21 and amounted to USD 25.3 billion, surpassing the previous record high level of USD 25.1 billion of FY14, which was an encouraging sign for export-oriented industries' growth despite slump in global demand amid the ongoing pandemic.

In the month of June 2021, the exports set a new monthly record by hitting USD 2.7 billion mark. The prior record of highest monthly exports stood at USD 2.6 billion, registered in Sept 2013. Minister for Trade Abdul Razzak Dawood has aptly congratulated Pakistani exporters for achieving this new milestone of success in this difficult time.

Meanwhile, remittances are also expected to cross USD 29 billion mark in FY2021 which will be a new record. In 11 months of FY2021, remittances inflows amounted to USD 26.7 billion, up 29.4 percent when compared with the quantum of remittances in corresponding period of FY2020.

In dollar term, remittances showed an increase of USD 3.6 billion in 11 months of FY2021 over the corresponding period of FY2020. Remittances data for the month of June 2021 will be available by mid-June which will determine the actual quantum of inflows of remittances in 2020-21.

In the first 11 months of the last fiscal (July 2020 to May 2021 period), Pakistan reported a current account surplus to the tune of USD 153 million, as against a deficit of USD 4.32 billion during the corresponding period last year. The full-year balance of payment position of Pakistan will be clear at the end of July 2021, when the State Bank of Pakistan releases BoP data for the month of June.

The current account surplus in 11 months of FY2021 also seems to be an outcome of the growth in remittances; USD 1.56 billion forex generation through the Roshan Digital Account till June 2021; and lending by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, etc.

Pakistan Stock Exchange also demonstrated a substantial growth in the last fiscal as the KSE-100 index depicted 38 percent growth in the rate of return for the listed companies. In dollars term, the rate of return was 47 percent, the highest level since FY04. In other words, for the first time since FY14, the dollar-based return in Pakistan's stock market was higher than the rate of return (38 percent) in Pakistani currency.

Importantly, the KSE-100 index closed the fiscal 2020-21 at 47,356 points, gaining 12,934 points over the preceding fiscal year. Despite the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic, the stock market exhibited strong growth in 2020-21 as many listed companies reported huge profits.

The stock market is one of the topmost economic indicators which reflect the trade and investment environment in the country. Nearly 13,000 points increased in the KSE-100 index in 2020-21 indicates that FY2020-21 was the year of recovery and growth for Pakistan.

According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data, the large-scale manufacturing indices demonstrated 12.84 percent overall year-on-year growth during July-April period of FY21. In the month of April 2021,

the large-scale manufacturing indices recorded a substantial increase of 68.07 percent in comparison with April 2020. However, when April 2021 LSMI was matched with that of March 2021, the LSMI growth was negative by 6.99 percent.

Textile sector led the large-scale manufacturing sector by exhibiting 3.39 percent growth with the highest share of 20.9 percent weight in the LSMI, followed by 3.05 growth of non-metallic mineral products.

Meanwhile, food, beverages, and tobacco recorded 2.52 percent growth; coke and petroleum products 0.91 percent; pharmaceuticals 0.96 percent; chemicals 0.45 percent; auto mobiles 1.68 percent; iron and steel products 0.46 percent; fertilizers 0.40 percent; and paper and board products showed 0.08 percent growth during the July-March 2020-21 period.



Amongst the leading large-scale manufacturing sectors, textile carries the largest weight of 20.9 followed by 12.4 weight of food, beverage and tobacco while weight of coke and petroleum products is 5.5, pharmaceuticals 3.6, chemicals 1.7, non-metallic mineral products 5.4, automobiles 4.6, iron and steel products 5.4, fertilizers 4.4 and weight of paper and board is 2.3.

Nonetheless, five sectors (electronics, leather products, engineering goods, and rubber products) reported negative growth (of 0.44 percent, 0.49 percent, 0.05 percent, 0.07 percent respectively) while growth of wood products remained unchanged during the reference period.

Foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan are also at a high mark at USD 23.256 billion in June 8 2021. Reserves available with the

State Bank of Pakistan are USD 16.106 billion while the commercial banks are holding USD 7.150 billion forex reserves. These foreign exchange reserves are equal to almost five months' imports as average monthly imports in FY2020-21 amounted to USD 4.66 billion.

However, a rapid increase in the trade deficit in the last financial year seems to be a matter of concern for the policy makers and analysts in the country. In FY21, the country suffered USD 30.8 billion trade deficit which was higher by 32.9 percent (USD 7.61 billion) in comparison with FY20. In FY21, the country's exports amounted to USD 25.3 billion while imports surged to over USD 56 billion.

In FY21 the annual imports bill was up by USD 11.517bn (USD 56.091 billion), from USD 44.574 billion in FY20. Sharp increase in manufacturing, growth in

exports, and consumption have expanded imports and trade deficit as well in the last financial year.

In the current financial year, the most daunting tasks for the government would be to achieve the PKR 5.82 trillion tax collection target; and to curb the energy sector circular debt, which has surged to 2.3 trillion rupees. Rising dollar-rupee exchange rate also seems to be a challenge for the government and it could further trigger price hike if the trend continues.

In recent weeks, the dollar-rupee exchange in the interbank has soared to 160 rupees, from 150 rupees. The federal government must evolve a strategy to manage these problems in this financial year to avoid further hike in consumer prices and any possible damage to economic growth in the country.

Glamour Returns Pakistan

as Coronavirus restrictions ease

Sparkling pictures of Hum Style Awards held in Lahore.

After a year of limiting glitz, glamour and extravaganza of award shows to virtual mediums, Pakistan's premier entertainment network, HUM Network Limited, hosted the glamorous red carpet, haute couture and trend setting fashion statements with its star-studded show Kashmir HUM Style Awards. The ceremony was held at Pearl Continental, Lahore. Hum style awards 2021 was presented by Kashmir, powered by GFC fans and brought to you by Rivaj UK.

Featuring the biggest celebrities of the film, drama, music and fashion fraternity, the night celebrated and acknowledged the stylish and trendsetting stars of the entertainment, sports and fashion industries in numerous categories, while also introducing the exciting new category of Fashion Stylist of the Year.





Pakistan & Eurobonds

The lowdown on Eurobonds and Pakistan's use of this debt instrument – from around the web.



By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

What are Eurobonds

Also called external bonds, the Eurobonds are a type of bond issued in a currency different from that of the country or market in which it is issued. Despite its name, it has no particular connection to Europe or the Euro.

The “euro” in Eurobond implies external. These Eurobonds should not be confused with Eurobonds with a capital “E.” When capitalized, the word defines bonds issued by the European Union or the European governments.

Private organizations, international syndicates, and even governments in need of foreign-denominated money for a specified length of time find Eurobonds suitable. Eurobonds are usually offered at fixed interest rate even when issued for long periods of time. OGDCL, Wapda, and various Pakistani banks have launched such bonds previously.

The North American company collects this capital and floats a subsidiary company locally in Pakistan. The collected capital, in rupees, is transferred to the local subsidiary by the parent company. The plant becomes operational, and the proceedings are used to pay the interest to the bondholders.

Benefits to the issuer

There are a number of benefits to issue Eurobonds rather than domestic bonds:

- ▶ States/Companies can issue bonds in the country of their choice and the currency of their choice, depending on what is most beneficial for the planned use.
- ▶ The issuer can choose a country with an interest rate that is favorable to its own at the time of the issue, thus reducing the costs of borrowing.
- ▶ Eurobonds have particular appeal to the certain investor populations. For example, many UK residents with roots in

India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh view investments in their homelands favorably.

- ▶ The company reduces forex risk. In the example above, the company could have issued the domestic bonds in the US in US dollars, converted the amount to Pakistan rupees at the prevailing rates in order to move it to Pakistan, then exchanged rupees for US dollars in order to pay interest to the bondholders. This process adds transactional costs and forex rate risk.
- ▶ Although Eurobonds are issued in a particular country, they are traded globally, which helps attract a large investor base.

Pakistan's Eurobonds

In December 1994, the Government issued its debut Eurobond for exactly this purpose and ostensibly also to set a benchmark for similar issues in the future. With Bear

Stearns as the lead manager, the USD 150 million issue was 84 percent subscribed by some 77 global institutions from fifteen different countries.

Pakistan was able to rollover and restructure (collecting all the previous issues) the Eurobonds of USD 610 million on more favourable terms in December 1999.

Pak Eurobonds until 2006-07

Pakistan issued three bonds during the period 2006-07. The total amount raised was USD 1,550 million (USD 500 million for 10 year, USD 300 million for 30 year and USD 750 million for 10 year). The average price for the three bonds was 7.16 percent. The credit rating for the country at the time was B2/B+ and B1/B+, significantly better than the rating inherited by the present government.

However, the PIB rates (local Pakistan investment bonds) during 2006-2007 periods were around 10.12 percent, implying only a small margin of 2.96 percent below the domestic pricing.

This compares less favourably than the 4.63 percent margin recorded in the present deal. Accordingly, the pricing of this bond is highly competitive despite lower rating that the country was saddled with in 2006-07.

Pak Eurobonds in 2014

Then on 9 April 2014, Pakistan raised USD 2 billion – Pakistan's largest ever single transaction – from international debt markets by issuing 5 years and 10 years Eurobonds. Eurobonds are debt securities used to tap dollar reserves present in other countries.

Pakistan had previously issued 10-years Eurobonds in 2007, with a credit rating of 'B1'. The interest paid at that time by Pakistan was 6.75 percent. At the time of bond issuance (in 2007), 12-month Libor was hovering around 5.3 percent and 5.4 percent.

On 9 April 2014, Pakistan raised USD 2 billion by issuing 5-year and 10-year Eurobonds – USD 1 billion from each type of bond – which carried the interest rates of 7.75 percent and 8.25 percent respectively. Although Pakistan had a relatively poor

rating of Caa1, Pakistan succeeded in generating significant interest in the issuance of bonds. At the time of issuance in April 2014, 12-month Libor stood at about 0.55 percent, which was significantly below the Libor in 2007.

In 2014's bond issuance, Pakistan had to compensate for the high economic and political volatility of the country. The risk coefficient of Pakistan had increased since 2007, which, in turn, had, theoretically, raised the cost of investment for firms in the country; so naturally, the investment required a higher return.

Other South Asian bond issuance in 2014

Pakistan was not the only South Asian country to issue Eurobonds in 2014. Sri Lanka and Bangladesh were also involved in similar bond issuance.



On 8 April 2014, Sri Lanka issued USD 500 million 5-year sovereign bonds at a yield of 5.125 percent. Sri Lanka was also involved in previous 5-year bond issuances in 2007, 2009 and January 2014 which were priced to yield 8.25 percent, 7.40 percent and 6.00 percent respectively.

Banglalink Digital Communications Limited, a subsidiary of Egypt's Global Telecom Holding, on 28 April 2014, issued a 5-year USD 300 million Eurobond with coupon rate of 8.625 percent. This was Bangladesh's first international bond.

Pakistan dual tranche issue of 2017

On Wednesday 29 November 2017, Pakistan (B3/B) successfully priced a

USD 2.5 billion dual tranche Sukuk bond offering comprised of:

- ▶ USD 1 billion 5.625 percent 5-year Sukuk Notes maturing on 12/5/2022 priced at par
- ▶ USD 1.5 billion 6.875 percent 10-year Notes maturing on 12/5/2027 priced at par

With federal cabinet approval for borrowing of up to USD 3 billion, early indications were for a USD 1.5 billion total print split equally between the two tranches. Given the strong investor demand however, with 2.4x over subscription and books over 6 billion (rumoured to be skewed to the 10-year) Pakistan eventually took out a total size of USD 2.5 billion.

The 144a/Reg S offering were marketed with initial pricing thoughts of 6 percent area on the 5-year Sukuk and low 7 percent

area on the 10-year conventional Eurobond tranche. Guidance came in at 5.75 percent-5.875 percent and 7 percent area on the 5-year and 10-year tranches, respectively with further price tightening prior to launch. Final price was set at 5.625 percent on the 5-year Sukuk and 6.875 percent on the 10-year Eurobond offering.

Citigroup (B&D), Deutsche Bank, Dubai Islamic Bank, ICBC, Noor Bank and Standard Chartered Bank were joint book runners to the issue.

Pak Eurobonds in April 2021

The government was able to raise USD 2.5 billion in 5-year, 10-year, and 30-year bonds. Government fetched USD 1 billion

in 5-year bond at a cut-off yield of 6 percent – against the indicative yield of 6.25 percent. The spread over US treasury is 508 bps. USD 1 billion was fetched in 10-year bond at the rate of 7.375 percent against the indicative yield of 7.5 percent. The spread over US treasury is 563 bps. Lastly, 10-year bond was issued at a spread of 454 bps. This means the pricing could have been much better.



However, given Pakistan is already offering 7 percent return to Roshan Digital Accounts (RDA) for 5-year dollar, 5-year Eurobond at 6.0 percent is surely a better deal. This also indicates the return offered to RDA holders is higher and needs to be revisited and aligned with Eurobond yield.

This is the second time Pakistan has issued 30-year paper. USD 500 million were raised at cut-off yield of 8.875 against the inactive yield of 8.875-9 percent. The last time 30-year issue took place was in 2006 when the government raised USD 300 million at the rate of 7.875 percent. The spread over US T-Bills was 311 bps against 647 bps today. Based on this, it seems that the bond is expensive.

Right now, Pakistan's total global capital market debt stock including the latest issue stands at USD 7.8 billion. USD 1 billion will mature in October 2021 and another USD 1 billion in December 2022. The issue is at a slight premium to secondary market yields of Pakistan's existing bonds.

The yield curve is becoming steeper – the difference between 5-year and 10-year bond is now 1.375 percent, and the gap between 10-year and 30-year bond is at 1.5 percent. The yield curve was even steeper for Egypt

– which received USD 700 million in 5-year at 3.875 percent, USD 1.5 billion in 10-year at 5.875 percent, and USD 1.5 billion in 40-year bond at 7.5 percent.

Placing the international bond (USD dominated) in context of Pak Rupee bonds (PIBs), the yield curve in domestic debt market does not look as steep. The difference in PKR between 3-year and 10-year

paper is 105 bps and between 5-year and 10-year paper, 56 bps. Looking at the steeper yield curve in USD market, chances of long-term yields in domestic market coming down look thin.

Pakistan's July 2021 Eurobonds issue

Pakistan sold USD 300 million of a tranche due in 2026 at 5.875 percent; USD 400 million in bonds maturing in 2031 at 7.125 percent; and USD 300 million in paper due in 2051 at 8.45 percent.

The USD 1-billion issue sold on 6 July 2021 in a reopening of an existing three-tranche bonds launched in March, a deal that raised USD 2.5 billion and was its first international bond sale since late 2017.

Pakistan sold USD 300 million of a tranche due in 2026 at 5.875 percent; USD 400 million in bonds maturing in 2031 at 7.125 percent; and USD 300 million in paper due in 2051 at 8.45 percent.

The bonds were tightened from initial price guidance of 6 percent-6.125 percent for the notes due in 2026, around 7.375 percent for the tranche maturing in 2031 and around 8.75 percent for the paper due in 2051, after

they drew more than USD 3 billion in combined orders.

The March transaction had attracted USD 5.3 billion in orders and was 2.1 times oversubscribed.

Pakistan was able to cut its cost of funding by 12.5 basis points (bps), 25 bps and 30 bps for each respective tranche of the "tap" – when an existing transaction is reopened for subscription, using the same documentation as before.

The March transaction's five-year tranche launched at 6 percent, the 10-year paper at 7.375 percent and the 30-year notes at 8.875 percent.

Pakistan, which has Fitch and S&P ratings of B-(minus) and a Moody's rating of B3 – all considered "junk", has set a 4.8 percent GDP growth target for the year that began on 1 July after growth of 3.96 percent in the 2020/21 financial year.

The International Monetary Fund, which is holding discussions with Pakistan on a 39-month USD 6 billion financing programme that began in 2019, estimates GDP growth for 2020/21 at 1.5 percent, while the World Bank projects 1.3 percent.

Credit Suisse, Deutsche Bank, Emirates NBD Capital, JPMorgan and Standard Chartered arranged the tap.

Pakistan's Future Eurobond Plans

Pakistan may sell a further USD 2-3 billion International bonds in the near future.

Pakistan is tapping the global bond market to raise USD 2 to 3 billion just three months after raising USD 2.5 billion through Eurobonds that remained oversubscribed because of attractive yields.

In view of the appetite of international market and offered rates, the government will go for maximum amount ranging from USD 2 to USD 3 billion in one go.

Pakistan has budgeted to generate USD 3.5 billion through international bonds during the current fiscal year. The federal cabinet approved launching of both Eurobond and Sukuk bond to raise USD 3.5 billion during the current fiscal year.

A Tightrope Between Belt Tightening and Growth

A review of the national budget for FY 2021-22.

Growth & Sustainability

Pakistan has faced several challenges in economy, aggravated by the Covid 19 pandemic but the PTI government has successfully progressed from recovery to stabilisation and onwards to sustainable growth. Provisional GDP growth rate for FY 2021 is estimated to be 3.94 percent against the targeted growth of 2.1 percent.

With the global economy in shambles, achieving growth at all would be significant, let alone posting nearly four percent growth. The current account balance during Jul-Apr FY 2020-21 had been in surplus of USD 0.8 billion (0.3 percent of GDP) against a deficit of USD 4.7 billion (−2.1 percent of GDP) in the corresponding period the prior year. This was made possible by an increased export of 6.5 percent to USD 21.0 billion and remittances significantly growing by 29.0 percent to USD 24.2 billion.

Revenue Collection

FBR tax collection grew by 14.4 percent to PKR 3,780 billion during Jul-Apr FY 2020-21 against PKR 3,303 billion last year and is expected to post a healthy PKR 4,691 collection by the end of FY 2020-21. The government has posted a primary surplus for the first three quarters of FY 2020-21. This has enabled the government to resume the USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility and completed the second to fifth review under the program with IMF.

However the journey to growth from stabilisation amid ravages of Covid-19 is tough and requires thinking outside the box. This is recognised by the government as Federal Minister for Finance and Revenue Mr. Shaukat Tarin stated in a recent interview, “We are making broad use of the recommendations we have found over there. For instance, the growth areas, productivity, investment, vibrant cities, markets, openness, creativity, internet access and technology usage – those are the areas of growth and those are the, I would say, engines of growth”.



Challenges

Pension

There is a considerable burden of pension on the government budget. The budget allocation for pension increased by 12 percent in 2019-20. This year the allocation has slightly increased from PKR 470 billion in 2020-21 to PKR 480 billion in 2021-22 with the slight growth of 2.1 percent.

Social Protection

The government has increased budget allocation for the Ehsaas Program from PKR 208 billion to PKR 260 billion. The government has also allocated PKR 68 billion to provide subsidies in energy, food, and other sectors with the focus to target the vulnerable segments only. To carry forward the stimulus package, the government in the current budget earmarked PKR 100 billion for Covid-related schemes. The SME sector has been provided PKR 12 billion for loans and other schemes.

Federal Divisible Pool

Provinces get around 59 percent of the FBR revenues as fiscal transfers. FBR performance over the past two consecutive years has been lacklustre. The provinces suffer immensely if the federal transfer is lower than expected. In case of lower federal transfers and limited or no options of

borrowing provincial service delivery suffers badly. This year the FBR revenue targets are expected to grow to PKR 5.8 trillion – 23 percent higher compared to the estimated collection of PKR 4.7 trillion in FY 20-21.

Key Budget Measures

- ▶ On the revenue front, targets are once again ambitious and stringent, possibly leading to an increased debt burden. The government is expected to achieve this by focusing on broadening the tax base through augmented documentation as opposed to introducing various new major taxes.
- ▶ The government has reduced sales tax on locally manufactured cars from 17 percent to 12.5 percent. The government has also exempted Federal Excise Duty (FED) on 850cc cars and will slash duty on electric cars.
- ▶ The government was introducing third-party audits, which would thwart the FBR harassing any individual or business entity. It looks very difficult but it had to happen one day. Those who are found guilty of evading taxes or deliberately hiding their income will be fined severely.
- ▶ Through the Finance Bill, 2021, the threshold of monthly electricity bill has

been reduced from PKR 75,000 to PKR 25,000 for the purpose of levying withholding tax at the rate of 7.5 percent. However, this tax will not be applied on persons who filed their annual income tax returns and are on the ATL issued by the Federal Board of Revenue.

- ▶ The finance bill proposed to tax profit on the debt component of GP fund and other such funds. The finance bill also proposed to withdraw personal income tax exemptions.
- ▶ The specified goods when supplied within the limits of the Border Sustenance Markets, established in cooperation with Iran and Afghanistan, will be completely exempted from the sales tax.



- ▶ Withholding taxes on mobile phones, will be reduced to 10 percent at first and then 8 percent later from 12.5 percent.
- ▶ The rich will be asked to pay taxes in accordance with their wealth. So the salaries class will not be burdened with additional taxes.
- ▶ Custom duty from vaccine and medicines of livestock abolished to promote the livestock sector.
- ▶ Tax exemption on paper used for Quran publication, auto-disable syringe, and oxygen cylinders.
- ▶ Tax collections saw an 18 percent increase last year as the country crosses the limit of PKR 4000 tax collection. 75 percent more tax refunds were made this year.

- ▶ Provincial share in the federally collected taxes to stand at PKR 3,411 billion. Provinces share in NFC increased, to receive extra PKR 707 billion.
- ▶ Sugar included in the third schedule of sales tax act, helping in the elimination of artificial hike in prices of the commodity.
- ▶ The Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has been tasked to collect an additional revenue of over PKR 1 trillion in budget 2021-22 over the current fiscal year's collection. This additional revenue will be achieved through the withdrawal of exemptions in sales tax, income tax, minimizing concessionary tax rates as well as through growth in economy and inflation.

decrease can be seen in interest payments share in current expenditure as well as a 5 percentage point decrease as a share of total expenditure for the upcoming budget FY 2021-22. This will allow the federal government a fiscal space to allocate more funds on development expenditures and other growth-oriented measures of the budget. However, given our debt now has significant long term commitments the interest cost may not fall. Last year saw a substantial decrease owing to G20 relief and lowered interest rates.

PSDP and Development Spending

This is a development Budget. The government has allocated PKR 900 billion under PSDP. This is an increase of 40 percent. The figure presents the sectoral priorities for next year's PSDP allocations.

The focus this year will be on food security (PKR 12 billion). These include locust emergency fund (PKR 1 billion), rice, wheat, cotton (PKR 2 billion) and olives (PKR 1 billion). Around PKR 91 billion has been earmarked for water resources which include Dasu Hydropower Project (PKR 57 billion), Diamer Bhasha Dam (PKR 23 billion), Mohmand Dam (PKR 6 billion), and Neelum-Jhelum Hydropower (PKR 14 billion).

The concept of public-private partnership has been introduced under PSDP Plus. This would involve the private sector in 50 projects worth PKR 2000 billion. Government will contribute PKR 61 billion as grant through viability gap fund. These will include roads, railways, logistics, science and technology, water etc.

Though it is ideal allocation under given circumstances, there must be a cost-benefit analysis of the assigned projects. The government should prioritise projects of soft infrastructure, including health and education, for inclusive economic growth momentum. Currently, the allocation to the education sector is only 4 percent, and the health and population sector is 3 percent of total PSDP allocation.

By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

Debt and Financing

- ▶ The federal government's total debt and liabilities reached a staggering PKR 37,078.5 billion by the end of April 2021. This is just an under PKR 2000 billion increase from June 2020, when the federal government total debt and liabilities amounted to PKR 35,107.1 billion.
- ▶ Against the total planned expenditure of PKR 8487 billion in fiscal year 22, PKR 3060 billion have been allocated for interest payments. As a result, 41 percent of the government's current expenditure (PKR 7523 billion) will be spent on interest payments. This equals 36 percent of the total expenditure for the year.
- ▶ Interest payments take up a massive portion of the budget expenditure, however, a 5 percentage point proposal of

The Anatomy of Pakistan's Power Crisis

Ineptitude doesn't begin to explain peak-summer blackouts in a power-surplus country. Is there more to our power crisis than meets the eye?



By Meer Diam

They told us Pakistan is a power-surplus country that it is a bad thing, and that the previous government was to blame for it: They encumbered the nationally kitty with generation capacity beyond our needs. Then they took credit for ending load shedding.

Then came the searing summer of 2021, and power blackouts hit many parts of the country: Electricity would remain out for an hour after every two-hour (and in some areas, one-hour) spell of power supply, day and night, at the peak of summer.

How could an otherwise energy-surplus country, with de-rated capacity to generate 29000 MW, experience a shortfall up to 6500 MW, disrupting supplies to industry and the households at the peak of summer?

The crisis, largely rooted in termination of gas supplies to the thermal power stations, remained unabated in official accounts until July 05 when the Energy Minister, Hammad Azhar, took to Twitter to announce restoration of normal gas supply and pressure to all sectors while claiming that load shedding had ended three days earlier.

When the power crisis was at its peak, official sources had conceded a shortfall of 3,200MW and claimed load shedding was just between three to four hours in areas with high loss feeders. The claim flew in the face of the fact that the hydel generation was (and remains) down by 3,500 MW, and the gas supplies had been halved reducing power generation to only 5000 MW from 10,000 MW.

Gas crisis

The gas crisis in the country hit the industry and the CNG sector hard due to the closure of the Kunnar Passaki Deep (KPD) gas field and the dry-docking of the LNG terminal. The crisis halted industrial activity in cement and fertilizer sectors and forced closure of CNG stations.

At the outset the power crisis, marked with severe load shedding, mostly unannounced and forced ones plunging differencing parts of the country into darkness for 3 to 16hours every day, had been triggered by the halving of gas supplies to thermal stations bringing their power generating capacity down to 5000 MW from 10,000 MW.

The government expected the KPD gas field resuming supplies to the Sui Southern Gas Company Limited (SSGCL) network after the completion of its annual turnover and the operationalization of the dry-docking of Engro's LNG terminal by July 5.

Mismanagement

Power crisis clearly seems to have roots in insufficient supplies of and coal to thermal power plants, maintenance of Tarbela hydropower station, inadequate transmission capacity, transfer of 550MW power to K-Electric, and power demand spike in summer months.

The national grid has been in dire need of upgrading, modernization and expansion to ensure reliable power distribution. However, the National Transmission and Dispatch Company's (NTDC) capacity has remained practically static for the past many years.

It has long been known that the 5,970-km 500Kv transmission lines, with 16 grid stations and 22,350 MVA transformation capacity, and 11,322-km 220Kv

transmission lines, with 45 grid stations and 31,060MVA transformation capacity can't cater to the needs of DISCOs during the peak of summer.

According to the Pakistan Economic Survey 2019–20, Pakistan's installed electricity generation capacity reached 37,402 MW in 2020. The maximum total demand coming from residential and industrial estates stood at nearly 25,000 MW, while transmission and distribution capacity languished at approximately 22,000 MW.

National Power Construction Corporation (NPCC) is the power system operator and allocates power generation share to DISCOs according to load demand and is also responsible for scheduling of annual maintenance of all power plants in the country, as well as temporary shutdown of any unit for any contingent reason.

On the one hand, DISCOs are not drawing the power as per quota given to them in spite of available generation capability and, on the other hand, annual maintenance schedule of hydropower stations, to be completed by the month of April every year, is not being strictly observed. NEPRA, the regulator, failing on these accounts has certainly implications.

The operation of the power grid is regulated under NEPRA's Grid Code and includes demand forecast, demand management and operational planning. Quite understandably, DISCOs are obliged to provide uninterrupted and reliable power supply to

the consumers, under provisions of their licenses obtained from NEPRA.

Clearly, the DISCO's are violating the set rules and regulations with impunity. NEPRA, on its part, has long delayed approval of the Integrated Generation Capacity Expansion Plan (IGCEP) 2020-2047 prepared by the NTDC in February 2019.

Problem solved?

The National Power Control Centre (NPCC), an arm of National Transmission and Dispatch Company (NTDC) recently disclosed during a hearing in Nepa that current transmission capacity is 25,000 MW as compared to 20,811 MW in July 2018.

The Power Division has claimed that gas supplies to the power plants after dry-docking have been restored and the electricity situation in the country has improved and there was no forced load management since 5:00 pm, 2 July 2021. Since there is no substantial improvement in the hydel electricity generation, demand is being met through thermal generation using alternative fuels.

While SNGPL has increased gas supplies from 685 mmcf/d to 750 mmcf/d, it remains short of original RLNG requirement planned by NPCC of 900 MMCFD and 705 MMCFD for August/September and October 2021 respectively. Obviously the committed volumes are quite inadequate to meet power generation requirements

during the high peak summer months, forcing the power sector to turn to uneconomical options like furnace oil or diesel.

Though the load shedding phenomenon will be over with improvement in gas supplies and resumption of hydel power generation to its fullest capacity, the summer power crisis has come as a rude awakening for consumers both in terms of inflated utility bills and inconvenience while burden of circular debt keeps piling up for the cash-strapped government.

The power sector remains grossly mismanaged and the Power Division seems nowhere to clear the mess. The resolve of the government to fix the power sector is nowhere to be seen despite frequent change of guards at the Ministry of Power. In the past three years, there have been three federal ministers and four federal secretaries without any tangible results for the power sector.

The regulator, PEMRA, seems to be toothless as far as the implementation of rules and regulations to the advantage of the consumers is concerned. NTDC has not had a permanent managing director in a long time and most of the DISCOs are being run on an ad-hoc basis without regular heads.

NTDC, NPCC and the DISCOs, each seem to be operating on their own whims, mostly stepping outside the regulatory framework, and fuelling chaos in power sector that sometimes seems to be intended and calculated.



When Justice is Not Justice

Why does the encroachment drive ostensibly guided by the Supreme Court of Pakistan wreck the poor but spare the rich?



By Azfar Ashfaq

Thousands of leased houses along the banks of two major storm water drains in district West and Central, a famous amusement park that housed a private club; a shopping mall with 650 shops in the heart of Karachi's Gulshan-i-Iqbal in district East; and a half century old locality in Federal B. Area are among the many establishments in the provincial metropolis on which the heavy axe of the Supreme Court of Pakistan has recently fallen.

The apex court has declared these buildings "illegal/unauthorised encroachments" and ordered the authorities their immediate demolition as incumbent Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed wants to restore Karachi to its past glory.

Officials happily complied with the orders targeting poor and low-income people, the same officials who invent ever novel pretexts to avoid implementation when it comes to the wealthy and influential. For instance, the apex court had ordered demolition of a 15-storey apartment building, called Nasla Tower, but despite passing three weeks not a single stone of the multi-billion-rupee project has been displaced.

The demolition of houses and businesses and eviction of people on the pretext of the drive against encroachment is not a new phenomenon for the people of Karachi. For the last over a decade the apex court, irrespective of who the chief justice is, has

been hearing matters pertaining to illegal constructions in the provincial metropolis, encroachments on amenity plots, commercial activities on military/cantonment boards' lands, conversion of residential and amenity plots into commercial spaces, etc.

The Supreme Court judges while sitting in Karachi has been passing orders on all the above-mentioned matters with great consistency and as a result government lands have been vacated from the clutches of encroachers; concrete structures erected on amenity plots in violation of land use policy have been razed; pavements have been freed up for pedestrians. Police stations or pickets constructed on greenbelts have been demolished in compliance with court's orders in specific cases.

In late 2018 and early 2019, over 2,000 shops in historic Empress Markets, its surroundings and in Saddar area were demolished just to restore the British-era structure to its original shape on the orders of the Supreme Court. The drive spread across the city and marriage halls, lawns, shops, houses built illegally on government lands or parks were demolished.

It is an open secret that the Sindh government as well other civic organisations, be it the Karachi Metropolitan Corporation, cantonment boards or Sindh Building Control Authority (SBCA), are not interested in the encroachment removal exercise since patronising encroachments, grabbing

of state lands is a lucrative business. Everybody from politicians to government servants and from police to officials of anti-graft and intelligence outfits is involved. So the drive gets mired as soon as the honourable justices leave for Islamabad and picks momentum the moment they return to the provincial metropolis.

The anti-encroachment drive gained momentum after March 2020 when the Supreme Court ordered the Sindh government and Pakistan Railways to revive the Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) project (abandoned since 1999) by clearing its tracks from all types of encroachments. In the ensuing months, an anti-encroachment drive rendered thousands shelterless – but the KCR project is not yet revived.

And when a record downpour flooded Karachi in August 2020, it was the Supreme Court that ordered the army-led National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) to take over the work to clean major storm-water drains in Karachi from the Sindh government, remove encroachments and widen them before the next year's monsoon season.

According to Sindh Local Government Minister Nasir Shah, there are 41 main storm-water drains and 514 small drains in Karachi and the NDMA is only responsible for three major drains — Mahmoodabad Nullah, Gujjar Nullah and Orangi Nullah. He says there are encroachments all over

but his party was neither responsible [for these encroachments] nor did it want to make anyone homeless.

Mr Shah is quite right that his party doesn't want to make anyone [read voters] homeless. The Mehmoodabad Nullah passed through an area from where the ruling PPP won the 2018 general election. So, the anti-encroachment operation was carried out there but a minimum number of houses constructed on the drains were demolished.

But when the same work began at Orangi and Gujjar nullahs, the provincial government of the PPP changed tack since the areas were not its strongholds. Besides the houses constructed on the two drains, leased houses situated along the banks of the drain were also declared encroachments to make way for 30-foot-wide roads.

Representatives of residents from the platform of the Karachi Bachao Tehreek question this duplicity when they ask at a recently held press conference as to why the width of the road along the Mehmoodabad nullah, which falls in the constituency of PPP leader and provincial minister Saeed Ghani, was limited to 12 feet and why not the same could be done with roads being built along the Orangi and Gujjar nullahs.

Nobody listened to them and finally on 14 June this year the Supreme Court ordered demolition of all the houses coming in the way of cleaning of Orangi and Gujjar Nullah. The magnitude of the displacement is so big that human rights experts of the UN had to issue a statement that reflected their concerns over the SC order.

The statement reads: "Human rights law does not prohibit resettling people who live along waterways if they are exposed to significant flood risk that cannot be mitigated otherwise. However, any project to reduce risks of natural disasters requires due process and full compliance with international human rights norms governing relocation and resettlement, and guaranteeing that no one is rendered into homelessness."

"The legal basis for this mass displacement and the remedies available to those who are affected are unclear. What is clear is the horrid effect on the displaced population, putting many poor families out on the street in the middle of the Covid-19 pandemic".

The UN experts call upon the government to ensure that its policies and practices are in full compliance with international human rights standards governing relocations, evictions, and internal displacement.

Following the UN concern and widespread criticism by rival political parties, the Sindh government has made a resettlement plan for 6,500 families displaced due to demolition of their houses along the two storm-water drains. Now, the provincial government will provide each displaced family an 80-square-yard plot. It has estimated PKR 1 million would be needed for the construction of each house and total PKR 3.5 billion is needed.

"The manifesto of the PPP calls for provision of shelter to the shelterless," Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah was reported to have told a news conference on 2 July. "Therefore, it becomes our responsibility to provide houses to the affected people".

The CM's announcement has brought some respite to the 6,500 families whose houses had already been demolished. But, no such relief was announced for hundreds of shopkeepers of Aladin Park.

It seems the Sindh government is taking all-out measures to save Nasla Towers from demolition as rumours are doing round that a powerful personality of the ruling party in Sindh is the actual owner of the expansive property. There are 150 apartments in Nasla Tower, only 50 of which are occupied. The current market value of one apartment is PKR 30-40 million and demolition of the building would cost the owner more loss than the few families currently residing there.

The Supreme Court had ordered the deputy commissioner of East district — where Aladin Park and Nasla Tower are located — to demolish the structures and submit a compliance report on the next hearing. The Sindh government had transferred DC Mohammad Ali Shah and despite passing more than three weeks no appointment is made in his place.

The government, according to an informed source, is to take the plea before the apex court that the SC order has not complied with because no bureaucrat is ready to take the job because of the pressure. Meanwhile,

the builder and residents are going to file a review petition against the SC's demolition order.

On the other hand, eyebrows have been raised over the haste with which the demolition orders were implemented for certain other settlements. The Aladin Park is run by a commercial organisation called M/S AA Joyland that was not even given time to file a review petition against the SC order and overnight 650 shops were demolished.

The 52-acre land for Aladin Park was leased out to a private company in 1995 when the KMC was run by its administrator Fahim Zaman. According to the agreement, 30 percent of the total land was to be used for commercial purposes but the company used 60 percent of the land. The company built over 650 shops instead of 280, constructed three marriage lawns (which were already demolished before the current exercise), offices and a private club on the premises in violation of the agreed terms and conditions.

But the company AA Joyland claims that the construction of Aladin Park and Pavilion End club was not illegal as it possesses all the legal documents. "Aladin Park and Pavilion End club on Rashid Minhas Road have been a source of entertainment for the people of Karachi for the last 25 years.

"The 52-acre tract of land was leased for an amusement park when the land was just empty ground. AA Joyland worked day and night to turn it into a full-fledged recreation area where citizens could spend happy moments with their families. But on 14 June the property was demolished on court orders on a few hours' notice, leaving thousands of people unemployed."

The objective of the incumbent chief justice of Pakistan to restore Karachi's past glory is indeed commendable, but why only punishing poor? People of Karachi are rightly asking the question as to why the SC's axe has been falling only on the poor and not on those who took bribes, gave permissions to construct houses, shops, etc., and patronised land grabbing.

After all, justice is not justice when it discriminates between the rich and the poor.

Can Pakistan Tax the Tech Giants?

Expert opinion is divided and other regional efforts have failed, but none of that means we should give up.



By Azeem Waqas

Pakistan's Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) has decided to cast the net for bigger fish: Global tech against that reap billions in revenues from the Pakistani market but never pay a penny in tax.

"We just want them to pay their fair share", said Member Operations, FBR, Ashfaq Ahmad Khan told The Truth International (TTI). The measure under consideration – targeting Facebook, WhatsApp, YouTube, Google, Netflix, Twitter, and TikTok, as well as for digital retailers like those on the Amazon, Alibaba, Daraz – could generate more than PKR 10 billion in tax revenue for the treasury.

"These companies are earning billion dollars but are not paying taxes in Pakistan", said Dr Ashfaq Ahmad. "FBR compelled Netflix to declare PKR 1.4 billion in income tax returns, which is huge and FBR has ordered them to pay tax".

According to PSLM Survey of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics 71 percent individuals used Internet for email, chatting, Facebook, voice and video calls, etc., while 7 percent reported using it for online shopping and banking.

The Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) has observed a net increase of 15 percent internet usage during Covid-19, in Pakistan. PTA attributed the increase in the number of internet users to the fact that almost all educational institutions, offices, and businesses have shut down physically and have instead implemented a "work from home" policy.

This is not for the first time that FBR is going after these Digital Tech companies. It has tried in past as well but could not succeed.

"These are foreign companies having no physical presence in Pakistan", Former Member Policy FBR, Dr Muhammad Iqbal says. "They are required to pay tax on their income in the country where their head offices are located according to international principles of tax law. If they have some branch offices in countries other than where their head offices are located, they would pay tax to those countries in respect of the operations in relation to these branch offices."

Dr Iqbal said that In Pakistan they have no branch office and no operations. FBR want to tax their income arising

from Pakistan. That income would result from the payments made by Pakistani citizens and companies to these foreign companies.

Dr Iqbal said that to overcome the problem in taxing income due to absence of any office or operations in Pakistan we found a solution and made some legal changes through Finance Act 2018. A new concept of "Fee for Offshore Digital Services" was introduced. This has been defined in section 2(22B) and includes all kinds of payments to companies like Goggle, YouTube, Facebook, Twitter, Netflix, etc.

At the same time it was made mandatory for every bank and financial institution to deduct tax at a rate of 5 percent on the amount sent abroad for payment of fee for offshore digital services to those companies. This deducted amount was made the final tax on income of these companies from providing digital services to Pakistanis.

The former Member FBR said, "A mechanism for taxation is available in law and FBR needs to inform what steps it has taken for implementation and what the amount of collection in last three years has been. Once the law

is implemented fully, the government can also consider to raise the rate of 5 percent”.

Digital Marketing agents are of the view that FBR would impose a tax on global tech giants who have been invoicing their revenues out of Pakistan. This digital tax will be levied on companies that have been leveraging data to push for products and services.

This means that ecommerce companies like Amazon and Alibaba, search engine and social media platforms like Google and Facebook that send target ads, and streaming services like Netflix will be subjected to digital tax.

Habibullah Khan, founder of Penumbra, a digital marketing agency said that the major source of Digital companies are digital advertising. Almost 80 percent of the revenue comes from advertisement and FBR can ask these companies to pay tax on the income generated and sent out of Pakistan.

However, FBR must show its willingness to use technology to broaden tax net and a digital mechanism to tax big companies without any interference and interaction of the officials, said Habibullah Khan, hoping such a system could help discourage bribery.

Habibullah Khan said that Pakistan has a dual taxation treaty with Singapore where all these companies are based. That has a clause 7 that states income tax exemption and this cannot be treated as business income as they do not have a Permanent Establishment (PE) in Pakistan. So FBR cannot tax Google, Facebook, etc., directly; and since FBR cannot block the internet, no tax is legally or practically enforceable.

“Total digital advertising spend is USD 250 million roughly, out of which USD 120-150 million goes to Facebook while 80-100 million goes to Google. Sales tax is already on advertising so if you advertise for 100 USD the government will get 13 USD from advertiser”.

Because of reasons mentioned above it is simply not possible. FBR cannot block social networks so you have zero leverage and legally they are protected by Singapore dual taxation treaty.

Habibullah Khan suggested that FBR can focus on is websites with massive traffic from Pakistan and get taxation from them. For example TV channel will receive money from Google directly because of the ads shown through google advertising network on their websites.

A Hootsuite Inc., report shows that there

were 46.00 million social media users in Pakistan in January 2021. The number of social media users in Pakistan increased by 9.0 million (over 24 percent) between 2020 and 2021. The number of social media users in Pakistan was equivalent to 20.6 percent of the total population in January 2021.

This report shows that USD 25.85 million was spent on total digital advertising in 2020, of which USD 6.67 million was spent on digital banners ads; USD 4.94 million on digital search ads; USD 1.58 million on digital video ads; and USD 930 thousand on classified ads. Except digital classified ads, all other heads have registered a significant increase year on year basis.

According to this report, Google received 373 million visits from Pakistan; YouTube 150 million; Facebook 90.9 million; Whatsapp.com 15.5 million, and Twitter received 8.49 million. The Twitter advertising dashboard says there are 2.10 million potential audiences that can be reached through Twitter adverts.

Industry experts say India and Bangladesh have also attempted to tax these digital companies and reportedly they could not succeed yet. It is a big task for FBR as well which has to show its will and capability to bring these companies in the tax net, which should translate to handsome gains for Pakistan.



Pakistani press is free to suffer

By Hammad Ghaznavi

'Facts are facts' is a cliché that doesn't mean much in today's world. Opinions, beliefs, scientific methods, inquiry – all stand mixed up in the present post truth era. Facts and alternative facts are jostling with each other at the peril of a bewildered lay person. No shared objective standards for truth anymore. The post-fact world used to be a philosophical concept – no more. Its manifestations are all around us; it's tangible, it's palpable, it's real.

Take Pakistan as a case study. Opinions apart, let's talk about 'facts'. What, for instance, is Pakistan's GDP growth rate? It sounds simple but it is not. The Government says it is around 4 percent, the IMF says its around 2 percent, the World Bank projects it at 1.5 percent, while the opposition estimates it even lower. How much loan has the present government taken during its tenure and where has it been spent? How many trees have the PTI government planted during eight years of its KPK rule? Is NAB a tool of political victimization or an organization curbing corruption? Is Nawaz Sharif a traitor? Why is the government filing reference after reference against Justice Qazi Faiz Essa? Is the quote often repeated by the military Public Relations officers, "we do not interfere in politics", true? There are dozens of such questions pertaining to our state and polity where not only opinions but 'FACTS' are divided.

For one, how free is the press in Pakistan? Prime Minister Imran Khan believes it's freer than the UK press. "Pakistan has one

of the freest presses in the world...To say there are curbs on the Pakistan press is a joke." While a host of senior media practitioners think that the country, though having a chequered history as for press freedom, is passing through its worst phase at present. The supporters of the hybrid regime dub these complaining journalists 'Lifafa' journalists. So, what is true? Will the truth be determined by the FACT which side of the political divide you are on?

Let's have a look at the 'Predators of press freedom', a list recently published by the RSF, Reporters without Borders, a Paris based, international press watchdog. Pakistan is ranked 145th of 180 countries in 2021 world press freedom index, and Imran Khan is included among the top 37 'predators'. The RSF report, inter alia, reads: "Cases of brazen censorship are legion since Khan became prime minister. Newspapers distribution has been interrupted, media outlets have been threatened with the withdrawal of advertising and tv channels signals have been jammed. Journalists who cross the red lines have been threatened, abducted and tortured. In the shadows, behind Khan in the limelight, Pakistan is reliving some of the worst moments of its past military dictatorships." Federal Information Minister says that RSF is not aware of the ground realities and the report is baseless, concocted and sheer nonsense.

The RSF report goes on with its scathing criticism of the Khan regime, highlighting the death threats to the journalists and their families if 'annoying stories' are not

stopped. Even the journalists who have taken asylums abroad are not safe, says the report. The bloggers and v-loggers are also "subjected to increasingly draconian censorship measures by Khan's government, while troll armies harass and vilify all journalists and bloggers who express criticism, automatically labeling them as anti-Pakistan, anti-military and...anti-Khan."

A top government spin doctor rubbishes the 'malicious' report: "Imran Khan has taken a historic and unprecedented stand in the national interest by refusing the USA airbases in Pakistan. The entire west is offended by Khan's Nationalist stance. Hence, the European Union's criticism of human rights situation in Pakistan and FATF's grey list. The vilifying RSF report shall also be seen in the same light. Khan's historic words 'Absolutely Not' is the real reason behind this anti-Pakistan and anti-Khan report."

Likewise, in one of his tweets, Fawad Chaudhry, in his own sarcastic way, criticizes the freedom of press in the west. "Shocked on [sic] daylight shooting of veteran Dutch reporter R.de Vries in Amsterdam Downtown, such attacks show tremendous difficulties of journalists working in EU, hope this incident will be investigated and justice will be served."

Having read these FACTS, will anyone change his/her opinion on the state of freedom of press in Pakistan? A matter of fact answer is – No.



Whither Population Welfare?

Pakistan must undertake sweeping population control measures to avert the continuing population explosion.



By Muhammad Zahid Rifat

The demographic dispensation of the world having a populace of around 7.8 billion has been subjected to chronic challenges prevalent mainly in the developing countries. The developed countries have enough resources to spend on welfare of the people and to utilize the demographic potential towards economic development but the developing world faces challenges of excessive population growth primarily due to lack of population welfare facilities, limited outreach to potential users, and illiteracy besides other protracted issues.

Pakistan also faced certain persistent complications and as such could not scale down the population growth rate because of half-hearted commitment by the governments in the past years.

The neighbouring countries such as Iran, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka have been able to control population growth through overt operations in the population domain. Pakistan's neighbouring regional countries have very effectively controlled the demographic and family planning indicators. But Pakistan continues to confront a very high total fertility rate of 335 and very low Contraceptive Prevalence Rate of 42.7 percent. Pakistan's crude birth rate is

estimated at around 27.33 per 1000, infant mortality rate at 61.4 per 1000 and maternal mortality rate at 165.6 per 1000 – all on high side according to the latest figures available from official sources.

Over 60 percent of our population is younger than 30 years of age and about a third of the population is living in poverty.

Apart from the overall population size, its characteristics also have a significant role in the development of a country. Thus, with regard to the growing population in terms of size and age, the capability of the country for providing social protection, healthcare, education and other basic services like housing, sanitation, water, food, etc., becomes a great as well as serious challenge.

Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world. Our population density stands at around 265 per kilometre.

The arenas of learning from the global best practices has led us to dedicate more financial resources and make investment in social portfolio particularly population and demographic domain. For a populous country such

as Pakistan, there are multiple areas which require attention with respect to population namely reproductive health, contraceptives and their supply chain mechanism, approach and access to service delivery, qualified human resources, specialized training facilities, field personnel, and the like.

Enabling of economic growth at national level requires mainstreaming of population sector dynamics to maintain a balanced population growth through coordination and consensus between the federation and the provinces.

The incumbent federal government has been able to create sensitization about factoring population as a priority agenda in mainstream policy making. The federal government has already declared national population control emergency, and marked population control as a national priority agenda to be mainstreamed in national and provincial policy-making aligned with Social Development Goals.

The country now has the highest level forum of Federal Task Force on Population which is headed by the President of Pakistan and has representatives from all the provinces and key stakeholders. The most anticipated

decisions to improvise the population sector which were lagging since decades are now expected to be taken in at this highest level forum.

There is lot more to be seen and know about official measures but the bitter ground realities belied all federal and provincial governments efforts and claims as Pakistan's population continued to grow in an unchecked, unabated and uncontrolled manner. Population growth bomb is going to explode much sooner than expected by the people and the government to say the least and it will be as disastrous as the looming threat of drought like situation by 2025 in the absence of major water storages. Construction of two major dams in a belated manner will obviously take sometime to offset the looming drought threats.

It is a bitter fact that rapid population growth is a major problem and looming crisis confronting the country as it lies at the centre of the country's socio-economic and political problems. Ever growing population is fast eroding and eating the somewhat limited national resources. Agricultural land is fast being consumed by the ever-increasing private sector housing societies thus adversely affecting food production in the country.

Even vegetables and pulses have to be imported or smuggled from India informally in the absence of any formal trade agreement and also from other countries as well as more feeding mouths were coming into this world in thousands every minutes and production of eatable items was getting lesser with agricultural land being turned into housing societies.

The latest population census, conducted in two phases in 2017, has also served as an eye-opener both for the federal and provincial governments as well as the stakeholders to start work on a rigorous population planning and strategy on priority basis without wasting any more time.

With a population growth rate of 2.4 percent reported in the Population Census 2017 with total population of 207.774 million, it is an utmost importance for Pakistan to ensure resource mobilization in a most effective manner to check rapid population growth.

Irrespective of the action plans and policies at the federal and provincial levels for checking continued population growth, there is dire need for changing the mind-set of the people particularly the young people to plan their families after their marriages keeping in view their incomes and resources.

Children's gender also contribute greatly to population growth as every literate and illiterate family preferably, in most cases, want to have boys and not children. Greed for having boys thus cause greatly to the family sizes and also contribute to the population growth without proper and effective family planning. Concept of preferably having two children irrespective of they being boys or girls needs to be very effectively, forcefully and rigorously enforced among the people particularly the young ones throughout the country.

There are many social taboos and barriers prevalent in the society both in the urban and rural areas which are hampering population welfare related activities and people by and large do not seem any harm in having large families of even into double figures absolutely unmindful of their responsibilities for providing better upbringing, education and food to their children.

Population Welfare departments officials also need to be activated and inter-active to their targeted segments of the society. They should also be seeking cooperation and help of the religious scholars, and imams and khateeb of mosques for exhorting the people to plan their families keeping in view their resources and there is nothing un-Islamic as such in making their much desired contribution towards checking population growth.

Merely setting up Population Welfare offices here and there without any much needed activity will certainly not help in achieving the desired results. The fact that Family Planning or population message has not been convincingly passed on to the people even after many decades is a very sad reflection on the part of the policy makers and more so on the field staff.

Historically speaking, Family Planning Association of Pakistan (FPAP) was founded in Lahore by Ms Saeeda Waheed in

1953. She was a member of the All Pakistan Women Association (APWA), founded by Begm Ra'ana Liaquat Ali Khan, wife of Pakistan's first Prime Minister. She started advocating for birth control when her maid died from an attempt to abort her own pregnancy.

The FPAP was unsuccessful in changing family planning policies until country's first military ruler, Field Marshal Ayub Khan took interest in the problem of overpopulation in late 1950s, according to information downloaded from internet. President Ayub Khan spoke about the menace of overpopulation while addressing FPAP's first national seminar in 1959. Soon after the seminar, the National Board of Family Planning was established as a policy advisory board for the federal government.

Pakistan's first Family Planning Scheme was part of the country's Third Five Year Plan 1965-1970. The scheme aimed at having a vast impact in the shortest time possible with a reduction of the birth rate from 50 to 40 per 1000 by 1970. At the outset of the programme, condoms were the most available method of contraception but 1966 the Ultra Uterine Device had replaced it as the cornerstone of the scheme as "safe, cheap, reversible" and it required "little user action".

Wajihuddin Ahmad, the Family Planning Commissioner during General Yahya Khan's regime focused on reducing pregnancies in women rather than meeting contraceptive targets alone and introduced the pill to Pakistani women.

US Agency for International Development (USAID) spent over USD 30 million on Pakistan Population Programme claiming over the 15-years timespan of 1964-1979. It is said the USAID provided 40 percent of total programme inputs between 1965 and 1975, but the programme was highly ineffective due to extreme and unrealistic goals.

Checking rapid population growth is a national obligation which must be attended to on a war footing to avert the continuing population explosion.

The writer is Lahore-based Freelance Journalist, Columnist and retired Deputy Controller (News), Radio Pakistan, Islamabad.

Another Eid, Another Call for Strict Observance of SOPs

As the third wave of Covid-19 dies down, we must avoid the complacency trap to stamp out the multiple variants of the bug on the loose.

By Noor Aftab

With Eid-ul-Adha just round the corner, health officials are warning the citizenry to continue observing the SOPs, failing which we could risk a fourth wave of the Covid-19 global pandemic in the country.

With the third wave of the Novel Coronavirus disease dying down, the question is whether we are giving the virus another opportunity to bounce back. There are more than one variants of the virus in Pakistan and the newly emerged Delta variant is more infectious and transmissible.

But Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are generally not being implemented in crowded markets, bazaars, food outlets and workplaces. It is certainly not a good idea to show leniency in implementation of SOPs as the threat of coronavirus disease is still alive.

Pakistan's daily coronavirus caseload went below the 1,000 cases for the first time in July. The country last reported 979 cases in a day on June 30. At least 908,648 people have recovered so far

across Pakistan, making it a significant count.

Province-wise breakdown shows a total of 341,275 cases have so far been reported in Sindh; 347,014 in Punjab; 138,616 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa; 83,048 in Islamabad; 27,445 in Balochistan; 6,504 in Gilgit-Baltistan; and 20,588 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir.

The international community is following a general principle that the SOPs must be followed unless 70 percent of a country's population is vaccinated and herd immunity is achieved. Three cases were reported in Melbourne (Australia) in the recent past. Although all three persons had arrived through foreign flights, the whole Melbourne city was shut down for five days.

As the pandemic re-emerges and suppression measures are put in place, there are renewed doubts and concerns about vulnerability, quarantine and social isolation. Health experts fear resurgence in number of scenarios that may compel the government to declare a fourth wave of coronavirus in the country.

Too early to declare victory

The third Covid-19 wave set in and caseload peaked in April as a result of which the government again imposed restrictions. The month of May saw a falling infection rate, which led the National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) to ease restrictions from 15 June.

New coronavirus cases in Pakistan have continued to decline in the past few weeks. The people feel relaxed and most of them have become complacent. Adherence to the SOPs – that help control spread of the disease – is on the decline.

A major threat at this point are patients with no or mild symptoms. If they are not tested, we will never know if they are infected. The ratio of conducting tests at the government-run facilities is on the decline, which is a very bad idea at this point of the pandemic.

Officials and citizens must realize that coronavirus is not going away anytime soon. We have to live with it for



months or years. The citizenry must develop a habit of taking precautionary measures to avoid being affected by the virus.

'We aren't out of the woods'

Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Asad Umar warned that the country might be hit by a fourth wave of Covid-19 unless the people follow the SOPs.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr. Faisal Sultan has said the government really needed to get at least a quarter of its population in dense urban areas vaccinated before Pakistan can even talk about any relaxation in coronavirus-related restrictions, including asking those inoculated against the disease to remove their masks.

As the coronavirus cases witnessed decline the government seems to be focusing more on economics rather than caring about the health of people. It is disheartening to know that 150 countries including those facing massive financial crises have done more Covid-19 tests than Pakistan.

The number of people visiting markets and shopping centres is increasing day by day and a large majority of them is ignoring the SOPs introduced by the government. The restrictions and lockdowns caused massive disruption around the world – reducing jobs, affecting people's health and taking children out of school – but they greatly helped control the virus.

Many fear that within a few weeks the situation may start worsening and the government may again have to impose restrictions. Pakistan Medical Association (PMA) General Secretary Dr Qaiser Sajjad has warned the people about a fourth coronavirus wave in the country by late July or early August.

He warned there was a danger of the coronavirus situation in Pakistan turning similar to that in India. He appealed to the citizens to follow SOPs and refrain from hugging and shaking hands on Eid. The potential is clearly there – the virus is still around and it is no less deadly or infectious than at the start of emergence of the pandemic.

Vaccination: Pakistan still struggling

Despite the government's campaign to vaccinate as many people as possible against the novel coronavirus, only 3.5 percent of the population in the country has so far been inoculated. The availability of coronavirus vaccine at the vaccination centres is still an issue that must be addressed at the earliest.

There had been reports of some vaccination centres closing down due to shortage of vaccines. The situation worsened in the middle of June but fresh supplies of vaccine doses from abroad helped thwart the crisis.

The government started administering the Oxford/AstraZeneca vaccine on 8 May and those who got first dose were asked to come for second dose after three months. The process of administering the second dose of this vaccine is due to start on 8 August, but official record show this vaccine is currently not available anywhere in Pakistan.

Unfortunately, the government is still struggling to increase the rate of vaccination. Initially, the government announced that it had set a target to administer vaccine to 300,000 people daily by mid-year. But availability of coronavirus vaccine and capacity building of health care system is necessary to achieve success in this respect.

It is good to see that Pakistan has made an agreement to procure 13 million doses of the vaccine from Pfizer and the doses would arrive by the end of 2021. Initially, Pakistan received 100,000 doses of the Pfizer vaccine through the COVAX facility on 29 May this year. But this vaccine was administered only to those people who were immunocompromised and not suitable for other vaccines.

Qatar has pledged to provide one million Covid-19 vaccine doses to Pakistan. The challenge at the moment when people want the vaccine is to have a steady supply so that the government never runs out of it. This is a challenge that will stay for the rest of the year.

General situation

The government has added over 7,000 oxygenated beds into the health care system across Pakistan. It is also working on manu-

facturing of ventilators at the local level. Officials claim that the relevant department would soon give its approval to the designs of the ventilators made by the local experts. If that happens, Pakistan will be able to locally manufacture ventilators and ensure their adequate supply to health facilities.

Around 267 ventilators were occupied elsewhere in the country with no patient on vent in Balochistan and Gilgit-Baltistan. Following the recent slowdown in Covid-19 incidence and death figures from the third wave, the government has announced partial lifting of some social restrictions. Complete lockdown on all commercial activities in all the larger cities has been reduced from two days a week to one day.

Other measures to ease restrictions include lifting of ban on local tourism subject to vaccination; permission for non-contact sports activities; opening up of restaurants for outside dining; relaxation of the 50 percent work from home policy; reopening of local public transport; and permission for intercity public transport travel with 70 percent seat occupancy.

However, inbound international flight operation are still reduced by 20 percent with rapid antigen testing on arrival imposed, in some cases followed by self-isolation. Larger social, religious and political gatherings are still banned. The Emirates has suspended flights from Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka until 15 July in accordance with the directives of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) government.

Need to observe SOPs

After a significant spike in the 3rd wave, touching the record levels of 200 deaths per day in end April, the Covid-19 situation in Pakistan is currently going through a mild decrease. Health officials are asking people to observe SOPs or risk a fourth wave of the disease.

It is up to the citizenry, then, to be responsible and ensure strict adherence to SOPs during the Eid festivities. We owe it to ourselves to stamp out this epidemic from our country and it is not difficult. If all of us wear face masks, observe social distancing, and follow the instructions given by the health authorities, we can ensure the safety of our families and cleanse our country of this deadly menace.

Your Mental Health Matters

Mental illness is just like physical illness: You find a healer, undergo treatment, and recover.

By Haider Rifaat

No one should have to feel alone in a world so polarized. It is upon us to afford support to anyone combating mental illness. We dedicate the month of May every year to shun stigmas surrounding mental disorders and find pathways to encourage people to talk openly about their personal troubles without judgement and fear. However, it is equally important to keep the conversation regarding mental illness afloat beyond the annual Mental Health Awareness Month.

The World Health Organization found that 264 million people suffer from depression worldwide while nearly 800,000 lose their lives to suicide every year. According to a 2021 report by Mental Health America, 19 percent of adults experience mental illness, which equates to 47 million Americans. Of these, 4.55 percent have severe mental illness.

Some 50 million Pakistanis suffered from mental disorders in 2016 while cases shot up by 30 percent the following year with 80 million people experiencing physiological and neurotic disorders. Every day, 15 to 35 people commit suicide in our country. Prevalence of suicide among Pakistani men is said to be two to three times higher compared to women.

According to Dr Murad Moosa Khan of Aga Khan University and President of the International Association of Suicide Prevention, Pakistanis between the age group of 16-40 years are most prone to suicidal behaviour, particularly in light of socioeconomic challenges posed by the pandemic.

It is critical to understand that depression could lead to suicide. Rising suicide rates can be prevented if professional help is sought to deal with mental disorders.

Depression does not occur by chance. A number of factors depend on it. Take for example, eating disorders, addiction, family troubles, past tragedies and abuse. Even individuals suffering from a disease as tragic as cancer can develop mental illness.

Humans respond differently to their environment, and that is okay. Those struggling with mental illness can recover as long as they seek therapy and develop a defence mechanism to bring risky behaviour patterns under control.

The road to recovery depends on your willpower and how you approach your depressive state. It also depends on the kind of culture you have been raised in. For instance, a large number of Pakistanis may look down upon mental illness or perceive it as an unreal phenomenon.

Having a hostile environment, consisting of unsupportive family members, significant others, peers and work colleagues, can exacerbate depression and hinder chances of recovery.

Acknowledging mental illness as a universal, deep-rooted disease is the first step to preventing it. It is equally important to take a stand for yourself and regain faith in professional help despite pushback from society.



It already takes a lot of courage to open up about mental illness let alone seek therapy. Suppressing depressive thoughts and internalizing pain would only cause more harm. These are self-inflicting, dangerous behaviours that individuals must avoid at all costs.

If you think you are struggling with mental illness, take someone you trust into confidence, a loyal friend or a close family member, and express what you feel. If you are afraid to do so, confide in a therapist.

Oftentimes, victims are too afraid to express themselves because society tends to suppress them. Many project their disdain, anger and aversion onto the sufferers just so they could feel better about themselves.

So, why would anyone facing depression feel the need to appease them? Survivors of mental illness should never have to compromise on their mental comfort for societal acceptance.

From a solution-based standpoint, it is for the government to invest in the development, maintenance and progress of recreational centres. The role of school and college counsellors is critical in countries where depression rates are on the rise – the United States for example.

Schools and universities should introduce monthly sessions on mental disorders to debunk myths surrounding them and to encourage more openness in talking about mental health issues. Immersing youngsters in a unique academic environment that teaches the importance of mental health would encourage them to become more confident as adults.

Workplaces should hire organizational psychologists – not merely for the purpose of human resource management but to promote the general wellbeing of their employees. Allowing paid paternity leaves for men and maternity leave for women, should also be factored in.

Let's take a moment to celebrate those who have shown perseverance and courage in the face of adversity, those who strove to find purpose in life despite psychological challenges. Many continue to battle mental illness in silence, so know that you are not alone in this fight.

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Tackling the Existential Threat of Climate Change

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



By Maheen Dhanani

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

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

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

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

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

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

Although a bit late to the game, the Pakistani government

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Pakistan Face ODI Whitewash in England

Let down by a batting line up struggling in English conditions, the tourists were thoroughly humiliated by a rookie English side.



By Ali Abdullah

With fifteen of the original English squad in isolation and two injured, the hosts took to the field with nine uncapped players – and they trounced the Green Shirts in two games in three days to win the three-game One-Day International series 2-0.

Seven members of the English side contracted Covid-19 with a couple of days to go before the onset of the ODI series, four of them officials and three players including captain Eoin Morgan. Two days before the first match, the England Cricket Board (ECB) replenished the squad with nine uncapped players, and recalled all-rounder Ben Stokes to captain the side.

Even so, the fledgling England XI thrashed Pakistan by nine wickets in at Sophia Gardens, Cardiff on 8 July 2021 before going an unassailable 2-0 up in on 10 July 2021 at Lords, London in front of 23,000 spectators.

Pakistan's tour of England has always been exciting for the fans as well as the players. Series with England have never been easy for Pakistan, as England is one of the best sides in the game. Other than that, English conditions have always been a challenge, not just for Pakistan but for other international teams as well.

After the final of HBL PSL, players were off to England the next day. Some flew out straight from Abu Dhabi while others left from Lahore. Players who were not part of HBL PSL started their quarantine a few days before their departure.

In a press conference ahead of the series, chief selector Mohammad Wasim explained his rationale for including of Azam Khan, Haris Sohail, Imad Wasim, and Wasim – and for leaving out Waqas Maqsood and Usman Salahuddin.

Notably, there has been a lot of queries on choosing Azam Khan, son of Moin Khan considering his weight. However, he has maintained his fitness visibly since the last edition of the Pakistan Super League (PSL). Wasim added that although fitness is crucial for an athlete, the PCB evaluations are based on a mix of fitness and talent.

Players from domestic circuit like Usman Salahuddin and Waqas Maqsood have once again been left out for the West Indies and England tours. Wasim explained: "Our Test team is quite settled and the others before them are lined up. They are still waiting for their turn. We have marked replacement and preference will be given to those who have performed."

Discussing the triumphs in the last six ODI series, Wasim reckoned that the team lacks a few prominent areas in middle order that can be solved by including the players like Haris Sohail.

“We have won six series in a row but still there are weaker areas. It was highlighted that we are facing problems in the middle order. Haris Sohail has reclaimed the required fitness standards which is why we have made changes to strengthen that area.

England Cricket Board and other officials had also confirmed a limited number of crowd would be allowed in the stadium. It is also a good sign for the Shaheen's as Pakistan's support in England have never disappointed team Pakistan, in fact they are more in number than the English supporters.

The first game of Pakistan's English tour was played at Sophia Gardens, Cardiff – the venue where Pakistan thrashed the World Champions England in 2017 in Champions Trophy semi-final.

England won the toss and elected to field. Saqib Mahmood from England bowled an unplayable in the first over, taking two big wickets, sending Imam Ul Haq and skipper Babar Azam back to the pavilion.

That pretty much set the tone for the rest of the game, preventing Pakistan from putting

a respectable total on the board. They were bowled out for 141 in 35.2 overs.

If Pakistan had any hopes of fireworks from their bowlers, they were dashed in spectacular fashion as the hosts lost only one wicket in sailing to 142 in 21.5 overs.

Umpired by Richard Kettleborough (Eng) and Alex Wharf (Eng), the game won England 10 points in the inaugural 2020–2023 ICC Cricket World Cup Super League. England's Saqib Mahmood was the obvious player of the match.

The second ODI played at Lords Cricket Ground, London was reduced to 47 overs per side due to rain. It was the 100th ODI of the English skipper Ben Stokes.

Approaching the game with great confidence, Pakistan won the toss and elected to field. The bowlers were able to stop England at 247 in 45.2 overs. Hassan Ali took five wickets and became the second bowler in the world to take four fifters in the last five years.

It looked as if Pakistan will chase down the target easily – until they were put in to bat

against a fiery English attack. Opener Imamul Haq, who edged a delivery from all-rounder Lewis Gregory. Wicketkeeper John Simpson took the catch to dismiss him for one off two deliveries.

Another collapse seemed in the making already when pacer Saqib Mahmood, who had spearheaded Pakistan's collapse in the first ODI, caught skipper Babar Azam (19 off 15) LBW. He then forced wicketkeeper Mohammad Rizwan (five off 11) to edge a plum catch to wicketkeeper John Simpson.

The only highlight of Pakistan batting beyond this point was youngster Saud Shakeel's first international half century as they were bundled off for 195 runs off 41 overs, allowing England an emphatic 52-run victory.

The third game of the series already secured by England 2-0 is slated for 13 July 2021 Edgbaston, Birmingham.

A three-game T20I series is also part of Pakistan's English tour agenda, which gets underway with a game at Trent Bridge, Nottingham, on 16 July 2021.



Euro-2020: Italians celebrate their victory against England

The giant keeper saved kicks from England's players Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka after Marcus Rashford hit the post while Federico Bernardeschi, Leonardo Bonucci and Domenico Berardi all scored for the Italians.



By Javed Mahmood

Italians have started nationwide celebrations the moments after their team defeated England by 3-2 goals in Euro-2020 final in London on Sunday. Italy won the European Championship for the first time since 1968 as Italian goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma saved two England penalties en route to a 3-2 shoot-out win. The giant Italian goalkeeper saved from Jadon Sancho and Bukayo Saka after Marcus Rashford hit goal-post while Federico Bernardeschi, Leonardo Bonucci and Domenico Berardi all scored for the Italians.

Soon after this great and stunning victory of Italy in the Euro-2020, millions of Italians took to streets and parks to express their joy over this hilarious victory with thrilling music and dances. Throughout the Sunday night, the roads and streets appear packed with Italian football fans.

At Wembley Stadium, England and Italy had fought out a 1-1 extra-time draw at a raucous Wembley on Sunday. Luke Shaw had given England a dream start with a superb goal after two minutes but Italy,

who offered almost nothing in response in the first half, gradually took command as the hosts sat back and leveled through Bonucci after 67 minutes.

It was the first final to be decided on penalties since Czechoslovakia beat West Germany in 1976 and will be wildly celebrated in Italy after they lost in the final in 2000 and 2012.

They made most of the running after halftime and in extra time and England can have few complaints after their early promise faded away.

It was nevertheless heartbreaking for most of the 67,000 Wembley crowd as England came up short in their first major final since they won the World Cup 55 years ago.

It had all started so well when Harry Kane spread the ball wide to Kieran Trippier and he instantly repaid coach Gareth Southgate's faith in recalling him by sending over a curling deep cross that the fast-arriving Shaw met on the half volley to hammer inside the post for his first international goal.

England had taken an early lead in their 2018 World Cup semi-final against Croatia before eventually being outplayed and beaten in extra time, but they did not look like giving up the initiative on home soil, playing on the front foot, though failing to threaten Donnarumma.

England keeper Jordan Pickford was similarly untroubled as Federico Chiesa's crisp shot went just wide and Ciro Immobile's blocked effort were all Italy had to show for a disjointed half.

For the Covid pandemic hit-Italians, their team's victory against England in Euro-2020 cup has made them jubilant and nationwide celebrations are expected to continue in Italy for some weeks.

It may be noted here that the United Kingdom has barred Italians for reaching London on Sunday to watch the final match at Wembley Stadium because of fresh spike in the coronavirus pandemic in the country. However, more than 65,000 fans of soccer ball watched this thrilling international event inside the stadium.

Hum Style Awards Herald the Return to Normal with a Bang

The 5th Hum Style Awards held in Lahore was a heady mix of eye candy and grey matter.



By Hasan Kazmi

The fifth edition of Hum Style Awards the first major entertainment industry event in Pakistan as the country emerges from over a year of shutdowns prompted by the Covid-19 global pandemic – although it allowed a limited audience in view of the still strong need for precautions against infection.

However, this award show was hit by controversy after a section of public raised concerns over the glamorous and stylish dresses worn by famous celebrities: #BanHumStyleAwards trended on Twitter for three consecutive days.

Interestingly, this is not the first time such awards have been held in the country. However the social media reaction was a bit too much this time in particular.

Khaid Soorty, who is the vice president of Special Projects at Hum TV Network, says “Being an award show that focuses on recognizing everyone’s personal sense of style and their individual freedom of expression, to infringe upon their personal choices would be denying them that right and that is something we do not want to do”.

Social media users have their own opinions and no one can stop them from giving their two cents, says professional stylist Amal Qadri, who styled almost everyone at the award show and created special looks with the help of designers. But – said Ms. Qadri speaking to the The Truth International (TTI) – that doesn’t mean our fashion industry has to stop and think how the social media will react to what they can and cannot wear.

“Fashion is an expression and we all have a right to show it

the way we want to”, said Ms Qadri. “I styled each and every individual celebrity according to what they prefer as a person and want to look like with what’s trending right now”.

She mentioned Alizeh Shah in particular, because she was trolled on Twitter for her choice of dress. She said that Alizay Shah had that whole fairy-tale vibe that she loves – that’s why both her look had that Disney vibe. Her attire was crafted by Ali Xeeshan.

On the other hand, the award show went well apart from that fact that it was delayed for nearly two hours. Compared to earlier events, this show was held on a relatively small scale. However the organisers were successful in keeping the glam and oomph factor was ubiquitous.

There were 3 most important highlights of the show.

Ali Zafar hosting and performance

The Awards were hosted by singer and actor Ali Zafar along with Urwa Hocane. Ali Zafar, who recently received the Presidential Pride of Performance President of Pakistan was the main draw of the event. At times it was obvious that he was not strictly following the script and preferred doing it spontaneously thanks to his natural wit and talent.

The most exciting part of the show were performances by Ali Zafar and Alizeh Shah on songs like Mela Loot Liya which he composed last year just before the 5th season of Pakistan Super League and Non-Item Number the famous song of Zafar’s first Pakistani film Teefa in Trouble.

Dam Mastam poster launch

The revival of Pakistani cinema was also on the cards as during the event, a film poster of the upcoming Pakistani film *Dam Mastam* was launched. The act was especially designed with a hint of a classic filmy love story through an engaging script. It was performed by lead actors Amar Khan and Imran Ashraf along with director Muhammad Ehteshamuddin and producer Adnan Siddiqui.

Featuring celebrities from the film, drama, music, and fashion fraternity, the night celebrated and acknowledged many stylish and trendsetting stars of entertainment, sports, and fashion industries in numerous categories, while also introducing a new category: Fashion Stylist of the Year.

The last edition of HSA was held in January 2020. Overall it is a commendable attempt by the Hum TV management to try to get things back to normal in the Pakistani showbiz industry. The three-hour event continued with full glitz and glam though there were a few technical glitches in between.

Some other dance performances were by film star Resham, fashion designer Hasan Sheheryar Yasin, and Aima Baig. Resham was flawless but HSY struggled to keep up.

Aima presented three songs and also tried to dance to her famous number from the films *Na Maloom Afraad 2* and *Kaif-o-Suroor* – all of which were beautifully sung but she was way out of her league when it comes to performing on her songs.

The most important awards in film category i.e., Most Stylish Actor (male and female) were won by Bilal Ashraf and Maya Ali.

Bilal and Maya haven't acted together in a film but now there are chances that we see them together very soon.

Most Stylish Actor, TV category, was won by Emaad Irfani and Nausheen Shah.

The rest of the winners are listed below.

It is understood that Hum Style Awards are given based on the style and overall persona of the personalities, rather than their work in their respective fields. This year a total of 19 statuettes were given away in the fields of fashion and entertainment.

Best Model – Male 2020 – Hasnain Lehri

Best Model – Female 2020 – Giti Ara

Fashion Photographer of the Year 2020 – MHM

Hair & Makeup Artist of the Year 2020 – Arshad Khan

Rising Star 2020 – Khushal Khan and Syed Hussain

Designer of the Year – Demi-Couture 2020 – Hussain Rehar

Designer of the Year - Bridal 2020 – Shehla Chator

Designer of the Year - Lawn 2020 – ELAN

Designer of the Year – Menswear 2020 – Emraan Rajput

Designer of the Year – Pret Wear 2020 – Amna Choudry

Retail Label of the Year – Apparel 2020 – Outfitters

Fashion Stylist of the Year 2020 – Yassir Aziz Dar

Rising star photography of the year 2020 – Azen Malick

Most Stylish Actress – Television 2020 – Nausheen Shah

Most Stylish Actor – Television 2020 – Emaad Irfani

Most Stylish Actress – Film 2020 – Maya Ali

Most Stylish Actor – Film 2020 – Bilal Ashraf

Most Stylish Performer 2020 – Shamoon Ismail

Most Stylish Sports Personality 2020 – Karishma Ali



The Moral Brigade Does it Again

If you find Alizeh Shah in a princess gown indecent, you need to see a head shrink.



By Zainab Umer

Alizeh Shah, a young star emerging has recently been under scrutiny by the public due to her choice of wardrobe. Shah, who formerly preferred a very demure eastern attire has now transitioned to a western style of clothing that has landed her in hot waters.

The subjecting of the Ehd-e-wafa to extreme Social Media scrutiny and backlash raises the question if Pakistani sensibilities will ever internalize the concept of personal freedom.

The holy warriors of our times did not hesitate before raining hellfire on Alizeh Shah for her choice of clothing. They could be seen posting the same question over and over again “Is this the Islamic Republic of Pakistan?”

But Shah was not alone in her plight. As Daily Pakistan reported, “Other celebrities including Ali Xeeshan, Ayesha Omer and Amar Khan have received immense criticism from the internet warriors for wearing bold dresses during the award show.”

Netizens not only typed away their distaste and rage but also took it in their hands to advise the brown-eyed beauty to choose a wardrobe that represented and reflected the culture of our society.

Some took it to their Instagram feeds, recalling PM Imran Khan’s statement after seeing Alizeh Shah in a strapless black princess gown. They wrote how the PM’s statement was correct and nudity was indeed the sole reason behind sexual hate crimes in Pakistan.

The Pakistani Twitter kept trending #Ban-HumStyleAwards after the recent choice of wardrobe by most celebrities along with the dance performances.

According to an article posted by LENS “Alizeh’s fans have expressed their dislike of her social media content and her transformation. For them, she has lost her ‘cuteness’ or ‘innocence’ and they want her ‘older version back’” Fans do not seem happy with the way Alizeh Shah has chosen to express herself in the past few months. However the actress seems indifferent towards the hate and harsh comments she has been receiving as she posted a video of herself captioning it “not seeking approval”

Pakistan and its people seem to be having a hard time adjusting to the idea of dissimilarity in society due to which sudden outbursts are seen quite often. Celebrities being right under the public eye are almost always victims of these harsh words and insensitive judgements.

According to an article by Dawn News “Embracing diversity can be a liberating model.” It is important to understand that there will always be people in society who will challenge dominant trends in the society.

Even though most people found vulgarity the main problem, most Pakistani’s were angered by the fact that celebrities representing the country were not ready to represent the culture and clothing of Pakistan.

As if the anonymous holy warriors were not raising enough of a hell, Actor Bilal Qureshi took to Instagram to moralise: “Ladies, you all are beautiful and talented so trust me you don’t have to wear revealing dresses to look like a diva in any award show (with due respect).”

Despite the couched phrasing, the judgement here is stark. Did he do it to endear himself to the rabid hordes or was he felt called to it? We will never know. However, while Pakistan has the ignominy of having the likes of Qureshi in our entertainment industry, we must not forget to count our blessings: Alizeh Shah, Ayesha Omar, and many others who express themselves the way they deem fit in the face of all this negativity.

The Original Superstar of the Subcontinental Cinema Dies

Dilip Kumar, the Peshawar-born legend of Indian cinema, has died at the age of 98, leaving behind a rich and complex legacy.



By Gohar Imdad

Born Mohammad Yusuf Khan in Peshawar, he made his fortune as Dilip Kumar in Mumbai – uniting Pakistanis and Indians in their adoration of the legendary actor. The late Dilip Kumar was a figure to transcend borders.

Born on 11 December 1922 in Peshawar, the original superstar of the subcontinental cinema moved with his family to Mumbai in the 1930s, where he lived until his last breath on the morning of Wednesday, 7 July 2021, leaving his legions of fans heartbroken.

He had been admitted to the intensive care unit of Hinduja Hospital on 30 June to “address medical issues” related to old age. He was earlier admitted to the same hospital on 6 June after experiencing shortness of breath.

Tributes and condolences poured in as Bollywood and politicians alike grieved over the loss of the actor. Prime Minister Imran Khan said Kumar was the “greatest and most versatile actor” for his generation.

The actor’s funeral prayer in absentia was offered at his ancestral home in Peshawar’s Mohallah Khudabad. A large number of Kumar’s fans and locals attended the funeral prayer and lit candles in his memory in front of his ancestral home.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that Kumar would be remembered as a “cinematic legend”. Actor Ajay Devgan recalled the many moments he shared with Kumar. “An institution, a timeless actor. Heartbroken,” he said.

His wife, Saira Banu has always been by his side over the years, as he ailed. The couple wedded on 11 October 1966, and overcame every hurdle in their way despite initial apprehensions regarding the 22-year age gap. Their relationship came to a standstill in 1972, when Saira endured a miscarriage.

During the 1980s, Dilip Kumar went gaga over Asma Khan. Notwithstanding, he got back to Saira Banu following three years and wrote in his memoir that the chapter with Asma was 'one that he needs to forget' and that 'he and Saira have driven it into blankness as an extraordinary error'.

Hailed as a "Tragedy King" because of his brooding good looks, tousled hair, and deep voice, Kumar played the lead in some of the Indian film industry's most commercially successful films of the period, earning him an iconic status.

The Bollywood legend missed out on international fame after turning down the chance to play Sherif Ali in David Lean's 1962 classic *Lawrence of Arabia*. The part went to Egyptian actor Omar Sharif.

His father was a fruit merchant who took his family to India's entertainment capital during the 1930s. But the son turned his back on the chance to take over the firm when the actress Devika Rani spotted him on his father's fruit stall in the then Bombay, leading to a part in his first film, *Jwar Bhata*, in 1944. Rani convinced him to change his name, so he chose Dilip Kumar, allowing him to cover what he was doing from his disapproving father.

Although *Jwar Bhata* flopped and leading film magazines criticized his performance, Kumar was undeterred and eventually broke through with the 1946 film *Milan*. Among his most remembered roles was *Mughal-e-Azam*. The movie, released in 1960, was eight years in the making and cost a mind-boggling 15 million rupees, but soon became one of Bollywood's biggest-grossing films of all time.

Kumar, who cited Hollywood greats Marlon Brando, Gary Cooper, and Spencer Tracy as influences, later won acclaim in 1964 for the nationalistic *Leader*, screened against a backdrop of recent wars against China and Pakistan. The 1970s saw fewer roles, as younger actors like Amitabh Bachchan took center stage.

For five-year's Kumar took a break from Bollywood after a string of flops, returning in 1981 with the hit *Karanti* (revolution) and a part alongside Bachchan in *Shakti* (strength) the following year, plus a string of character roles.

After a series of flopped films, he took up a more active role in politics in 1998 and worked to end the feuding between India and Pakistan. The same year saw him receive the highest civilian honor in Pakistan, angering Hindu nationalists. Two years later, he became a lawmaker for the then-opposition Congress party.

Unlike many actors who appeared in hundreds of films, the versatile Kumar selected his roles carefully by Indian standards, which only increased his stature in the fiercely competitive industry. In 2006, he accepted a lifetime achievement award at India's National Film Awards in recognition of his contribution to Indian cinema. He would still say he was baffled at his own success.

The Pakistani media has widely covered the decease of India's 'first legend actor.' Publications like Dawn and Geo TV have shared articles on the passing away of the screen legend. The latter shared an article on how Kumar was the 'one man who could bring India and Pakistan together.'

"Dilip Kumar Saab visited Pakistan twice furtively to unite Hindus and Muslims. I have disclosed it in my book (*Neither a Hawk Nor a Dove*) as well," Geo TV quoted former foreign minister of Pakistan, Khurshid Mahmud Kasuri, as saying.





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