

The Truth International

15th - 31st August 2021

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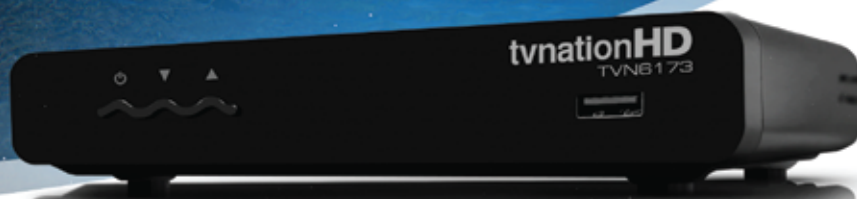
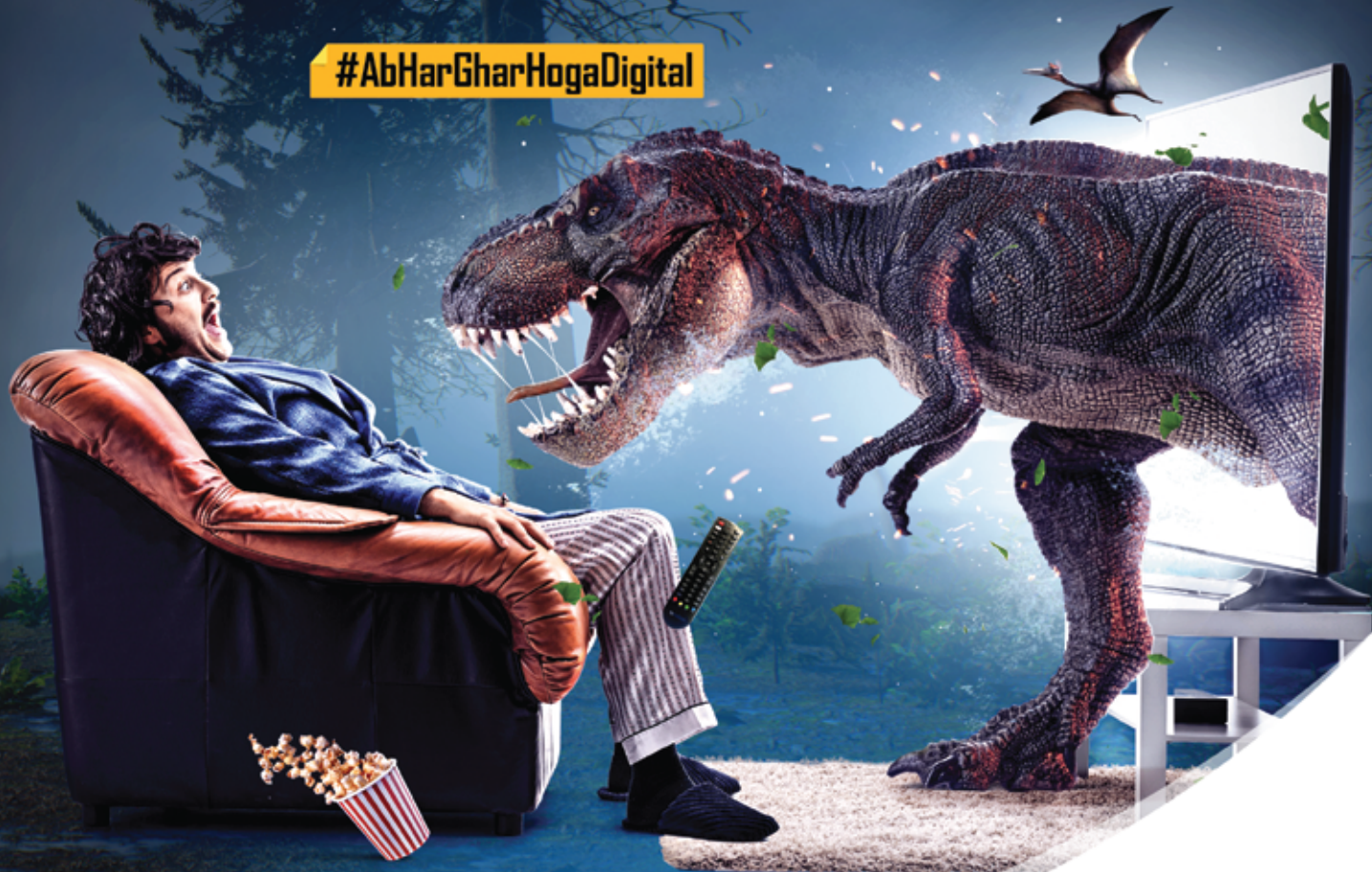
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CONTENTS

On the Cover

Amid reports of a rift within the party ranks, the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) suffered a setback when the British Home Department refused Nawaz Sharif's request to grant further extension to his stay in London on "medical grounds."

Should Nawaz Sharif Return to Pakistan? By Khalid Wasim – **Page 05**

Editorial

Will he return, or won't he? by M. Ziauddin – **Page 04**

Politics

Snap Polls on the Cards? By Naveed Miraj – **Page 07**

The Tareen Factor by Ahmad Waleed – **Page 08**

Foreign Affairs

Taliban at the Gates by Haq Nawaz Khan – **Page 10**

Pakistan's Unending Afghan Nightmare by Umer Farooq – **Page 12**

Big US-China Showdown in Little South Asia by Zainb Umer – **Page 14**

Stuck with Lists by Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 15**

Kashmir Question Far from Settled by Dr Moonis Ahmar – **Page 18**

Greensill: David Cameron 'made \$10m' before company's collapse - TTI Report – **Page 20**

COVID-19

Delta Variant on the Rampage by Noor Aftab – **Page 22**

Economy

A Prize (Bond) Blooper by Zain Rihat – **Page 24**

Rats and Moles in Our Midst by Asadullah – **Page 25**

Three Intel Pharma Companies Earn \$25 Billion in 6 Months Just Because of Covid by Javed Mahmood – **Page 26**

The Wrecking Ball of the IMF Program by Dr Ashfaq H. Khan – **Page 30**

Reign of Inflation? By Javed Mahmood – **Page 32**

Pakistan's Priciest LNG Purchases, Explained by Khalique Ahmad – **Page 34**

History

CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS And its impact on the World by Azmat Mumtaz Saqib – **Page 36**

Profile

Zia Ud Din – An Era of Financial Journalism in Pakistan by Kamal Siddiqi – **Page 38**

Tourism

A Piece of Heaven on Earth by Mishaal Ashraf – **Page 40**

Climate Change

Haggling Over the Cost of Saving the World - TTI Report – **Page 41**

Technology

The Rise of Machines by Mahrukh Khalid – **Page 43**

Social Issue

Justice for Noor Mukadam – and the Rest of Them by Mahrukh Khalid – **Page 45**

Sports

Mental Health and Competitive Sports by Haider Rifaat – **Page 47**

KPL Roars into Action – **Page 49**

Glorious Finale Marks End of Tokyo 2020 Olympics – **Page 50**

By Ali Abdullah

Entertainment

The Double Disruption Called Chinto Ki Mummy by Hasan Kazmi – **Page 51**

Bilal Ashraf 'Never Wanted to Become an Actor' by Kaukab Jahan – **Page 53**

City Notes

Mujahid-i-Sani is not Mujahid-i-Awwal by M.A. Niazi – **Page 55**

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Will he return, or won't he?

By M. Ziauddin

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif's application for visa extension has been turned down by the United Kingdom's Home Office, but with the right to appeal allowed against the decision. Since he has already lodged the necessary appeal at the Immigration Tribunal 'for the time being' his visa to stay in the UK, nevertheless, remains valid.

In the immediate run, the rejection of Sharif's application for visa extension had won the PTI-led coalition Government of Prime Minister Imran Khan some quick political brownie points while providing at the same time a handy hook, to the innumerable PTI mouthpieces, to hang on their cliché-ridden anti-PMLN NAB tales.

On the other hand, in the first flush, the home based PMLN leadership had seemingly kept panic, if there was any caused by the rejection news, under effective control; but the same cannot be said about the Party's grassroots support which, for a short time, seemed to have been shaken from its hinges because such a possibility had remained far too removed from their imagination.

Reports reaching here from London talk of a degree of confidence on the part of Nawaz and his family that the Immigration Tribunal would grant further visa extension 'taking into consideration the circumstances surrounding his case'.

Those who claim to know the UK rules that cover such visa extension cases believe that the earlier extensions allowed to Nawaz presumably on health grounds had a maximum life of 18 months. Any automatic extension of his visa without referring the case to Home Office would have been seen as the UK government taking a political position to side with Nawaz in his running feud against the Pakistani establishment. For London it would have been too tactless a position to take vis-à-vis Islamabad.

Therefore, the resulting legal rigmarole, in the process of which he seems to have re-earned UK's hospitality 'for the time being'.

According to the UK legal experts 'for the time being' could last from 9 months to more than a year and a half (20 months). This period does not even take into account any potential subsequent judicial review once all appeal rights have been exhausted.

So, although Mr. Nawaz Sharif has been refused visa extension, it is not necessarily the end of his stay in UK. There are several grounds and precedents which are available under the UK's immigration laws for those seeking relief. The application could be based on human rights grounds namely under Article 8 and possibly also under article 3 of the European convention on human rights.

Under Article 3, Nawaz Sharif would need to prove that his health would be at a real risk of serious, rapid and irreversible decline resulting in either intense suffering or substantial reduction in life expectancy due to lack of medical treatment or access to that. This is a very high threshold and very difficult to succeed on. But Article 3 also provides protection against torture or inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment. "In medical claims a claimant may claim his return would amount to inhuman or degrading treatment." The threshold under article 8 is lower but there is a huge amount of discretion involved in those applications and they are decided based on what is fair and reasonable based on a concept of proportionality.

Due to the ongoing backlog caused by the pandemic, it could take nearly two years before a decision is made on Nawaz Sharif's appeal and in the event his appeal is refused he still has the right to launch the whole process anew through a fresh application.

But what is at stake here for Nawaz and his PMLN?

Well, in case Nawaz succeeds in winning an almost permanent stay- visa and prefers to remain in UK for the rest of his life, then he would probably be writing what could be the PMLN's obituary.

On the other hand, in case he returns to Pakistan say after 9-10 months, he would certainly go straight to jail. But then even an incarcerated Nawaz in Pakistan would be politically too formidable for the PTI-led coalition government to confront in the final year of its 5-year term.

If one recalled the way the former Prime Minister was monopolizing the political scene in the country since the very inception of the PTI government in August 2018, his departure for UK in November 2019 and his extended over stay of nearly two years there did provide, in retrospect, Prime Minister Imran Khan the much needed space, (though still not complete, thanks to Maryam Sharif's crowd pulling capacity) to re-enforce his own and his Party's political presence.

The fact that both official and private medical boards found the platelet crisis of Sharif to be genuine and also the fact that courts were too accommodating to let Nawaz proceed to UK at no great cost to him monetarily and with the minimum of legal hassle, makes one wonder if it was all not the handiwork of the establishment to get Nawaz out of Imran's way so that the PM Khan governs without being challenged by Nawaz on daily basis from his jail cell.

So, if Nawaz does not return home before the next elections it is certainly going to be curtains for the PMLN; but if he returns home during the last leg of Khan's term, we are most likely to witness a highly interesting general election!

Should Nawaz Sharif Return to Pakistan?

UK's sudden refusal to extend the former prime minister's visa has come as a blow to PML-N.



By Khalid Wasim

Amid reports of a rift within the party ranks, the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League-N (PML-N) suffered a setback when the British Home Department refused Nawaz Sharif's request to grant further extension to his stay in London on "medical grounds."

Mr Sharif, who has been living in self-exile in London since November 2019, has already filed an appeal in the UK's Immigration Tribunal in line with the country's laws and now awaits a decision. Under the British laws, he can legally stay in the country till the final decision of the tribunal, which can take months to decide.

The development stirred the otherwise dull political atmosphere in the country and once again led to a commotion between the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and the opposition PML-N as both sides accused each other of doing politics on the health issue.

The PML-N leaders and workers in Pakistan received the shocking news at a time when they were still reeling under the trauma of losing their party's governments in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) and Gilgit-Baltistan within a span of five months.

The party spokespersons were busy in refuting reports in the media regarding the rift within the party due to the prevailing of two extreme narratives when they had to come out in the defence of their supreme leader in the wake of the UK government's sudden decision.

Soon after the decision of the UK Home Department came to the light, two key federal ministers made an offer to the PML-N supreme leader that the Pakistan government could arrange his return to the country on a 24-hour notice, "if he desires so."

They made the offer because Mr Sharif's passport had already expired in February this year and presently he has no documents to travel.

Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed had once disclosed that he had been directed by Prime Minister Imran Khan not to renew the diplomatic passport of Mr Sharif.

On the other hand, the PML-N says that Mr Sharif has no intention to early return to the country and he will continue to stay in the UK till completion of his treatment. The PML-N also clarified that Mr Sharif had not applied

for asylum after refusal of his visa extension and that he had only filed a review petition before the UK tribunal.

"This does not in any way amount to a political asylum and is only a request for an extension to his stay on medical grounds", said PML-N information secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb while officially conforming the development on 5 August.

No one knows exactly on which specific date the UK government has actually turned down Mr Sharif's request for an extension in his London stay. It was PTI Senator and former minister Faisal Vawda who had first disclosed through his Twitter account on 3 August that the UK authorities had cancelled Mr Sharif's visa.

Definitely, his source had provided him a technically wrong information as it was not visa cancellation, but a rejection of Mr Sharif's application for an extension in the stay.

Mr Sharif, had been undergoing a seven-year imprisonment at Kot Lakhpat Jail after his conviction in Al-Azizia case when the Lahore High Court in September 2019 granted him a bail on medical grounds.



The PML-N maintains the cases against the Sharifs are politically motivated and Mr Sharif's conviction was secured by the establishment by blackmailing the judge.

According to the medical reports, the country's three-time prime minister was suffering from complicated heart diseases and an immune system disorder due to which his platelets had come down to a dangerous level. Later, he proceeded to London in November 2019 with the special permission of the PTI government.



Despite the fact that the government had itself granted permission to Mr Sharif to leave the country after discussing the issue at the highest decision-making forum of the federal cabinet, a number of ministers and the PTI leaders, including Prime Minister Imran Khan, on a number of occasions alleged that the PML-N leader had fled the country after presenting fake medical reports.

The government ministers also repeatedly vowed to make every effort to bring Mr Sharif back to serve the remainder of his prison sentence. The Pakistan government even formally requested the British authorities to extradite Mr Sharif, but got no positive response.

Now, the UK Home Department's decision has provided another opportunity to the PTI to hit out at Mr Sharif and his party. Commenting on the development, Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry in a video

statement said Nawaz Sharif now only had an option to apply for an emergency travel document from the Pakistan High Commission in the UK to return to the country and face corruption cases against him.

Terming the rejection of extension in Nawaz Sharif's stay in the UK a "welcome development", the information minister claimed that Mr Sharif had no legal grounds to satisfy the tribunal about his further stay in London and it had been established that he had lied about his health.

Mr Chaudhry also warned Nawaz Sharif that he could face jail in London if he lied before the UK tribunal, saying that it is abundantly clear that Nawaz Sharif is not sick as he was seen dining in restaurants and strolling on London roads.

Similarly, State Minister for Information Farrukh Habib at a news conference in Islamabad called Mr Sharif a 'fugitive' and 'absconder' who, according to him, had been living in London with an expired Pakistani passport.

On the other hand, PML-N President and Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Shehbaz Sharif has ruled out the possibility of early return of his elder brother until his "full recovery." During his telephonic conversation, he has advised Nawaz Sharif to stay in London "till his treatment is completed".

"The nation and the PML-N are more concerned about your health and they are praying for your fast recovery," the younger Sharif reportedly told his elder brother over telephone.

It was on the submission of an undertaking to the court by Shehbaz Sharif that he would ensure return of his brother "within four weeks or on certification by doctors that he has regained his health and is fit to return back to Pakistan" that Nawaz Sharif had been allowed by the government to leave the country.

"It is inhuman to do politics on the health of a three-time premier. The government machinery is bent upon defaming Nawaz Sharif for its politics, which is earning a bad name to the country," Mr Sharif later said in a reported statement.

Commenting on the development, PML-N's Vice-President Maryam Nawaz, who is presently in quarantine after testing positive for Covid-19, declared that the ministers' reaction had again proved how her father was on the nerves of the PTI government.

Apart from these political statements, the decision of the British Home Office has also generated a debate in the country's political circles as a number of analysts believe that it is time for the former prime minister to return to the country and face the courts.

"Instead of trying to extend his stay abroad indefinitely, he should return to fight his case in court, regardless of his and his party's reservations about the charges against him. His presence would boost the PML-N's chances in the next elections," the Dawn daily said August 7 in an editorial on the development.

However, many PML-N's local leaders believe that while staying in London, Mr Sharif has complete liberty to lead his party and communicate with them. They are of the view that Nawaz Sharif's return will ultimately land him in jail, thus making him inaccessible for them.

Background interviews with a number of PML-N office-bearers reveal that some of them have the fear that Mr Sharif's life will not be safe in the country.



Snap Polls on the Cards?

If Khan's ways as a cricket skipper are anything to go by, the shambolic opposition could soon be in for rude awakening.

By Naveed Miraj

With a fractious and divided opposition unable to pose any major challenge to his government, rumors are very much in the air that Prime Minister Imran Khan is preparing to call snap elections, dissolving the National Assembly before the completion of its term.

His propensity to spring a surprise on his opponents every now and then as a cricket captain was legendary. But Khan seems to have carried his cricketing ways over into politics – something that lends credence to the theory.

Most recently, the Prime Minister put himself in the firing line this March when he decided to take the vote of confidence from the National Assembly after his Finance Minister Hafeez Sheikh lost a high profile Senate seat to the opposition candidate.

Under the circumstance, it is not inconceivable to see Khan seek fresh mandate from the public through early general elections. Some crystal gazers of the capital say the PM may announce snap polls as early as the beginning of 2022 to catch the opposition in disarray.

Analysts say if Khan does indeed jump the gun at the federal level, the fate of provincial assemblies may be no different – three of which are controlled by his coalition.

On the other hand, although Khan was successful in securing the vote of confidence from his electoral college, seeking fresh mandate from the public is an entirely different ball game. Observers say the move may prove suicidal given the history that our electorate has never reelect a ruling party.

Something is definitely cooking up behind the scene that has given rise to whispering about early dissolution of assemblies. The question, however, is what has really happened which has encouraged the ruling party, especially the PM, to think on these lines.



One reason may be the PTI's recent triumphs in Azad Kashmir Legislative Assembly elections and the by-election in Sialkot.

In addition, the PTI is very cocky about the support it enjoys among expatriate Pakistanis. This is also the reason that it has geared up efforts for electoral reforms envisaging not only the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) but also granting right of vote to overseas Pakistanis.

The government has already passed a bill to this effect from the National Assembly and desires its early approval from the Senate. Khan apparently believes his party will be well positioned to win the next election if the overseas Pakistanis are given the right to vote from abroad.

Some political pundits suggest the government may go for early elections as soon as early next year – allowing just enough time for government to push through electoral reforms and to be seen delivering on its electoral promises.

By the end of this year, work should be well underway on most of the development projects under the PSDP for which PKR 900 billion have been earmarked for the current fiscal year, a healthy forty percent increase from the previous year.

It is to be hoped the PM does not fall victim to wishful thinking. One reality check for him could be gauging his approval rating at the time of snap polls compared with his popularity ahead of the last election. Right now, for instance, the PTI is not as popular as it was before the 2018 elections.

To say the people are greatly disappointed over his three years in government would be an understatement. Those who voted for 'tabdeeli' (change) have been disillusioned because it has simply evaporated.

Above all, the soaring prices of essential commodities have given rise to widespread public anger against Khan's government. Turning this sentiment around in short order is all but impossible – and holding early elections early next year may well prove disastrous for the PTI.

The government, therefore, would be well advised to avoid this trap and focus entirely on fulfilling the promises it made with the public. In the next two years, it must prioritize development projects and strengthen the industrial and agriculture base, which should automatically create jobs and enhance purchasing power.

It is only after winning the hearts and minds of the people that the PTI can stand a good chance in the next polls.



The Tareen Factor

Imran Khan's estranged lieutenant is biding his time for now, but he will make his move sooner or later.



By Ahmad Waleed

In the past, Imran Khan has been criticised for ditching many of his party's founding members who were ideologically committed to the manifesto of the party for the sake of the so called electables. Now, he is seen dumping his personal friends and benefactors – including Jehangir Tareen who shepherds a gaggle of electable loyalists.

“Prime Minister Imran Khan spares nobody”, remarked a PTI leader recently. “Call it his strategy or whatever, it does leave an impression that he has no strings attached”.

There is no denying that the class of electables with ‘deep pockets’ is his favourite choice now. He has learnt the art of winning the game of thrones to strengthen his hold on power. For this, he will not think twice about discarding his old associates come what may.

Zulkar Ali Bhutto did the same thing. The PPP emerged relying solely on the committed party workers coming from the middle and lower middle class but he shifted his focus to the feudal lords of the country in 1977 elections.

These filthy rich electables have been the choice of all major political parties and martial law regimes. The recent elections in Azad Jammu and Kashmir and Sialkot have also shown similar trends. Imran Khan is no different from the old class of rulers.

However, Jehangir Tareen had become a major irritant. Many believe Imran Khan got rid of Tareen because he had fears that his one-time lieutenant could one day become his replacement despite being disqualified from public office.

It does not help that Tareen is a master

wheeler-dealer who knows the art of herding turncoats and electables to his camp as he has demonstrated while mustering support for his estranged friend Imran Khan.

Although, there has been infighting and grouping within the ruling PTI for quite some time, the emergence of Jehangir Tareen Group laid bare the serious rifts within the ranks of the party.

The estranged leader of PTI, Jehangir Tareen, who thinks his disqualification from the National Assembly was a ‘balancing act’ by his party, faced a big blow when none other than Prime Minister Imran Khan decided to hold a thorough inquiry into the sugar millers’ affairs.

Despite some desperate attempts like offering ‘relief, development funds and other concessions’ the government has not



been able to woo back the members of the group with the exception of Punjab MPA Nazir Chauhan, who had the audacity to use religion card to malign PM's key advisor Shehzad Akbar.

Strong arm tactics by Akbar soon forced Chauhan to abandon the group and return to the party fold. He then complained he has been 'used' by Mr Tareen to settle his personal score. Shehzad Akbar is thought to be one of the masterminds behind the cases against Jahangir Tareen.

Khan is angry with Jahangir Tareen, who has been the closest aide and who stood by his leader through thick and thin. However, the PM has 'felt sorry for his long-time friend Jahangir Tareen' for his involvement in sugar scam. He can't do 'injustice' to him.

Imran Khan got another confidant Aleem Khan arrested for 'owning assets beyond his known sources of income' and yet another of his 'friends', Zulfi Bukhari, was sent packing for his alleged involvement in Rawalpindi Ring Road scandal.

Now Awn Chaudhry is another guy on the block. He was told to make a choice between Imran Khan's party and Jahangir Tareen's group. Awn resigned from the post of special coordinator to the Punjab Chief Minister on political affairs instead. He preferred Jahangir Tareen. He affirmed his allegiance and loyalty to the 'most loyal member of the PTI who served selflessly as I have.'



Mr Awn would 'stand behind' his leader Imran Khan on every occasion. He regretted that he served the party 'wholeheartedly, completely ignoring' his personal life and family or a cause. "Sadly I was 'rewarded' by being removed right before the oath-taking ceremony of the Prime Minister which I accepted with grace," he stated.

There is no reaction from Jahangir Tareen on the recent developments taking place in Lahore. His loyalist and the most outspoken MNA of his group Raja Riaz, nonetheless, has praised Awn Chaudhry's stance, saying that he is also willing to resign if the same was asked of him, but he would never

distance himself from Jahangir Tareen.

It shows that Jahangir Tareen group is gaining strength. Everybody in the party knows that Jahangir Tareen is the man behind the successful formation of PTI governments in the centre and Punjab. If the situation remains the same, Tareen can be more harmful than helpful in deciding the future course of action of the party.

On the other hand, it seems Imran Khan does not care as long as the powers that be have faith in him. Nevertheless, the next general elections will definitely see new political alignments and adjustments that are going to pose a big challenge to the PTI.

The Truth International

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Taliban at the Gates

With their military blitz now reaching provincial capitals, hardliners among the Taliban are raring to take Kabul by force.



By Haq Nawaz Khan

With their offensive operations picking up pace and provincial capitals falling like dominoes, hard-line elements within Afghanistan's Taliban militia are pushing for an outright military takeover of Kabul and rejection of any power sharing formula. The Truth International (TTI) can report.

"The Taliban leadership is feeling the pressure from their hard-line fighters to take Kabul by force", sources in Afghanistan told TTI. "They do not favour any sharing formula.

"This group is of the view that the Taliban have rendered sacrifices for almost two decades, and now when they have defeated the superpower [US], nothing should be allowed to dilute their victory".

Media reports out of Afghanistan speak of Taliban rumbling in several parts of the country. As we go to the press, the word is that the puritan militia has

seized control of eight provincial capitals in five days.

Afghan Taliban claim taking total control of Badakhshan's capital city Faizabad and Baghlan's provincial capital Pul-e Khumri. In a statement released to media, Taliban key spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid claimed they have captured nine out of the 34 provinces of Afghanistan.

The Taliban military strategy has apparently moved into a higher gear with the militia now moving to take over provincial capitals. Meanwhile, Kabul does not seem to have a solid strategy to counter the Taliban onslaught, with Afghan forces either tactically retreating or surrendering to Taliban fighters.

On the other hand, it may be too early to write off the Afghan government, which has a modern air force in addition to 300,000 well-trained

military and police forces.

In the first phase of their strategy to build pressure on the Kabul, Taliban moved on the district capitals and seized key supply routes. They now control the trade routes from south to north and west. This has seriously hobbled Kabul's ability to supply weapons to provinces.

Among the provincial capitals taken by Taliban are Kandahar, Helmand, Takhar, Kunduz, Nimruz, and Samangan while fierce fighting is raging in several provinces in the north and west.

Taliban are releasing pictures of the surrendering soldiers and government officials to media. They have codenamed this offensive "al Fatah" or the victory.

Afghan top leadership have been deliberating on the security plan to protect the rest of the provinces, and retake the districts lost to Taliban.

Afghanistan senior leader Marshal Abdul Rashid Dostum has arrived after some medical treatment, and met President Ashraf Ghani to discuss the prevailing security situation.

The peace process is said to be at standstill at the moment, as both sides focused on the battlefield. The world is calling upon the warring sides to cease fire and return to the table to work out a peace settlement.

Everyone is convinced that the continued violence could bring destruction and misery to the people of Afghanistan. But the pace of the fighting suggests Taliban are in no mood to accept anything short of a military takeover of Kabul.

The hard-line Taliban argue that the US led coalition forces ousted them of Kabul illegally and unjustly, so with the invaders leaving, they have every right to return to Kabul as victors.

They are not prepared to recognise the legitimacy of Dr Ashraf Ghani's government, which they say is a regime imposed upon the Afghan people by foreign forces.

The international community including Pakistan has made it clear to Taliban that they would not accept a military takeover of Kabul.

According to Dawn news, "National Security Adviser Dr Moeed Yusuf has said that Pakistan will not accept a "forceful

takeover" in Afghanistan and instead supports a political solution to the war-torn country's conflict."

"We will not accept a forceful takeover," he told reporters at a press conference held at the Pakistan embassy in Washington, DC, wrapping up a week of talks with the US administration. He said the only solution for Afghanistan is a political one.

Pakistan is being blamed for supporting Taliban through safe havens inside Pakistan. Allegations to this effect have been levelled by Kabul as well as reported in some international media outlets. Islamabad has consistently denied any such sanctuaries on its side of the Afghan border.

In a recent interview, Prime Minister Imran Khan publicly denied such reports, adding, Pakistan had been hosting nearly three million Afghan refugees for decades, and thousands crossed the border into and out of Pakistan every day. If some militants are indeed crossing the border in the guise of Afghan refugees, this can be highly dangerous for Pakistan.

But unlike the past, Pakistan has taken a firm stance of not accepting military takeover of Afghanistan, in line with the international consensus to persuade both sides to agree on a peaceful settlement of the decades-long conflict.

Instability in Afghanistan will pose a serious threat to the whole region and world, but Pakistan will suffer the most

as it shares over 1,600 miles of border with Afghanistan.

In a television interview, Pakistan former senior diplomat Dr Maleeha Lodhi expressed serious concerns for Pakistan.

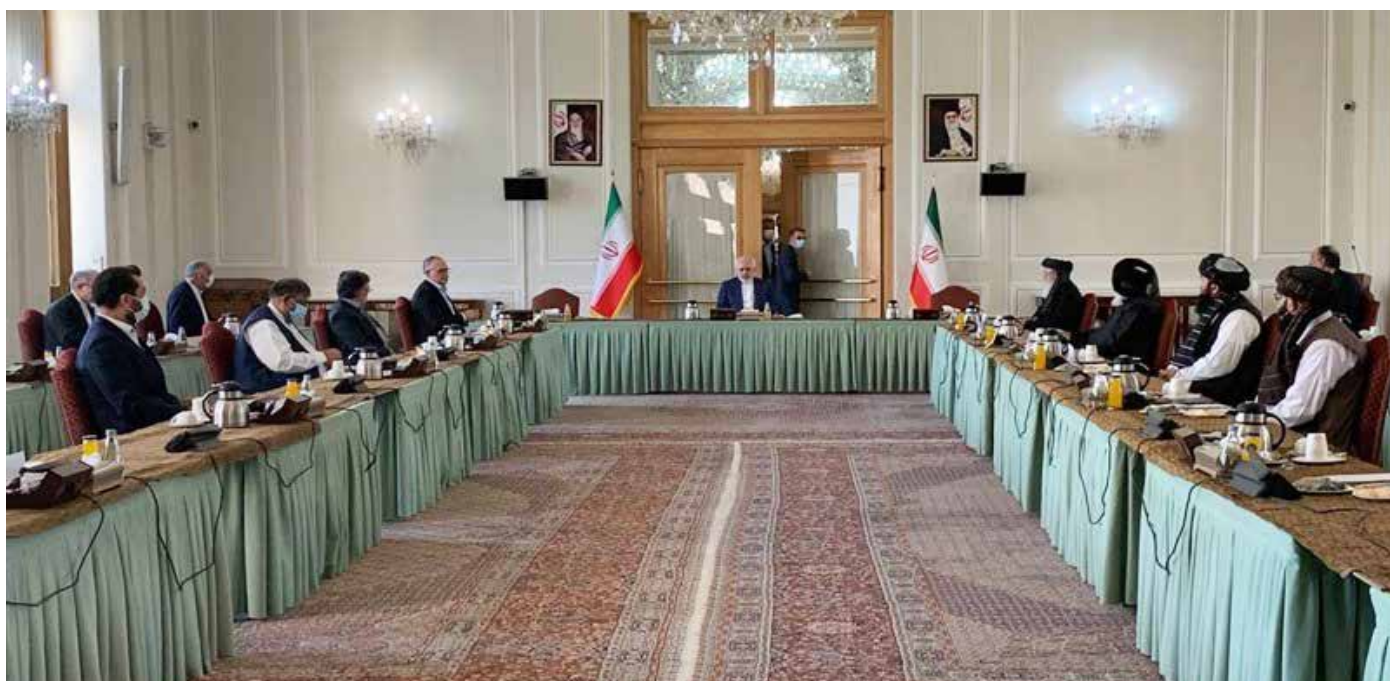
"It is the most dangerous time for Pakistan", she said. "Pakistan's stance on Afghanistan is aligned with the international consensus. It is agreed internationally that no such government will be accepted, if it is formed as a result of military takeover."

She was commenting on a recent emergency meeting of the UN Security Council on Afghanistan, as some officials on ground were sharing the worsening situation.

She said it was high time for Afghanistan, and international community to push for the diplomatic efforts to reach a political settlement. "The Doha meeting is very significant, and diplomatic efforts would be reinforced."

Russia has taken the initiative of two-day meeting of representatives of US, Russia China, and Pakistan in Doha, Qatar. UN representatives will also be part of the process to revive the moribund peace dialogue between the Afghan groups.

Taliban and Kabul negotiators' meeting in Tehran few months back was a positive development, as both sides agreed to speed up the peace process. But no follow up action was seen, and reports coming from Afghanistan speak only of fighting.



Pakistan's Unending Afghan Nightmare

The situation unfolding in Afghanistan is fraught with untold diplomatic and military hazards for Pakistan.



By Umer Farooq

The situation in Afghanistan will remain a defining factor in US-Pakistan in the coming years. Will there be a full-fledged civil war in Afghanistan? Will the Taliban be able to achieve a military takeover of Kabul – a scenario that Americans are ready to go to any lengths to avert and that can vitiate diplomatic relations between Washington and its erstwhile ally, Pakistan, in a big way.

Pakistani position is perilous to say the least. Our clout with the Taliban could become our biggest liability, potentially fraught with both a diplomatic fiasco and a security nightmare.

The potential diplomatic fiasco inherent to the situation is that the international community is not ready to accept a military victory for Taliban in Afghanistan and given the impression of Pakistan's more than a little influence with the militia, the guns will turn towards Pakistan in case Kabul falls in the coming months.

The potential security nightmare inherent to the situation is that a military victory for Afghan Taliban will embolden Pakistani Taliban and associated militant groups into

renewing their militancy and terror attacks against Pakistani security apparatus and urban centres.

A palpable sense of Pakistan's dwindling strategic importance has come to the fore in the wake of the US strategic decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. This means that Washington is no more fixated on terrorism and extremism as a primary threat worthy of its military, political, and financial resources in future.

The US strategic direction has changed and Pakistan and its security forces will no longer have a crucial position in Washington's strategic calculus as they had been playing in the wake of 9/11.

Afghanistan's outsized role in US foreign policy will diminish. But there is every chance that the US would continue to exert political and diplomatic pressure to achieve its desired goals on Afghanistan's chessboard – the first of which will be to deny the Taliban a clear cut military victory.

Pakistan will be at the receiving end of this diplomatic political pressure coming from

Washington. The second important political aim that Washington seems to have in mind – as far as the public assertions of its senior officials are concerned – is to ensure an oversized role for India in the future political game of Afghanistan.

The US decision to withdraw from Afghanistan unilaterally was received with a palpable sense of shock in New Delhi. New Delhi's strategic community perceived the US decision as a betrayal and a clear indication that India's economic interests in Afghanistan were least of US concern.

This sense gleaned from the emerging security situation in Afghanistan, where Taliban were militarily advancing and government in Kabul lacks the means to put up any tangible resistance, was contrasted by US official assertions that which expressed the US intentions to give an oversize political and military role to New Delhi in Afghanistan – a scenario which visibly perturbed Pakistani security apparatus.

In February 2020, during his only visit to New Delhi, the former US President

Donald Trump reportedly offered Indian Prime Minister Modi certain guarantees about US decision to reconcile with Afghan Taliban.

“India need not worry” is how one Indian official, as reported in Indian media, described the US President’s message to Indian government as the US started to plan its withdrawal from Afghanistan.

Later, the US Administration continued to make efforts to assuage the fears of Indian officialdom with regards to the security nightmare that US withdrawal would likely bring for India economic assistance and intelligence operations in Afghanistan.

According to Indian media, New Delhi believes that US-Taliban Agreement amounts to a sell-out and indicate US willingness to leave Afghanistan at the mercy of Taliban and Pakistan – something that caused great anxiety within the Indian officialdom.

Indian fears are not restricted to what will happen to their USD 3 billion investment in developmental aid to Afghanistan or what will happen to Indian economic interests in the country.

These fears are much larger in scope – we can sum up these strategic fears under two the following heads in the light of what we gleaned from Indian media and papers written by strategic and foreign policy thinkers.

1) The Indian fear of a spill over of terror threat based in Afghanistan and reaching its territory

India perceives most of the Sunni militant and terror groups based in Afghanistan as a threat to its security.

There has been lot of mixing up of ideas and technique among the militant groups which can be described as regional and the militant and terror groups that are now based in Afghanistan but came from the Arab world.

For instance, Daesh is based in Eastern and Northern Afghanistan and have interacted thoroughly with Pakistan based militant groups like Lashkar-e-Jhangvi Al-Alami, which is now based somewhere in Southern Afghanistan and had carried out a large number of sectarian attacks in Quetta.

Similarly, the Indian fear that the remnants of Al-Qaida – a shadow of their former self according to US officials – might get emboldened and try to become instrumental in terror attacks in Kashmir – a region under Indian control where there is a lot of indigenous political unrests underway.

India also perceives Afghan Taliban as a highly anti-India force. Indian officials have been visiting Tehran and Moscow recently after US withdrawal was announced in a bid to muster support against the threat of rise of Sunni militancy and terror in Afghanistan.

Reportedly, Taliban representatives were also present in Moscow and Tehran when Indian officials visited these capitals, indicating that India would be facing a different political situation and might face difficulty in building an anti-Taliban consensus in the regional capitals.

But that doesn’t change India’s perception and strategy of projecting Sunni militancy as a brainchild of Pakistani ISI and making an attempt to build a regional consensus against Pakistan and Afghan Taliban.

2) US withdrawal will pave the way for Pakistan control of Afghanistan

This is India’s second strategic fear that Pakistan will be in a controlling position in the post-withdrawal Afghanistan. The fear stems from perception of Indian officialdom that sees Pakistan’s security apparatus in a position to dominate Sunni militancy and terror emanating from Afghanistan.

Indian government has made massive investment in communications in Afghanistan in order to ensure that it has access to the landlocked country through Iranian ports, but it also has plans to further access Central Asian oil and Gas rich economies both as markets and suppliers of energy to meet the demands of the fuel thirsty and growing Indian economy.

In this way, Indian strategic planners aimed to undercut Pakistan’s strategic importance. Now with Afghanistan drifting towards a total military control of Taliban, India’s heavy investment in road and communications in Afghanistan are likely to be trashed – or so India officialdom fears.

Indian media and strategic thinkers feel that India has a lot of goodwill among Afghan

population. They think that they made the right investment and in the right country, but not at the right time.

In the post-2014 situation, the rise of the Taliban was clearly written on the wall – this was the year when US and western intelligence and diplomatic officials started engaging Afghan Taliban in backchannel talks.

Reports about these engagements started to make headlines in newspapers and media outlets across the world. The Indians simply ignored these reports. It seems they didn’t factor post-US Afghanistan into their future planning for the war torn country.

They continued to pose themselves as the most potent opponent of Islamist militancy and terror. One continuous indication of this advocacy role was reflected in their media and strategic thinkers’ writings and blogs, where they started to put all their eggs in the baskets of American military power, even in south Asian regional politics and in their propaganda efforts against Sunni militancy and terror.

Now that the US has made a deal with the Afghan Taliban, a paragon of Sunni militancy in our region, and has left the region militarily, India has been completely left high and dry.

It will be alone, at least militarily, to feel the heat of remnants of Sunni militancy left in Afghanistan, which, according to Indian fears, could reach their territory within no time.

The US administration is clearly but subtly advising Pakistani security that there is nothing for Pakistan in this situation – that Pakistani security apparatus must not try to exploit the situation.

Anything happening in Afghanistan to Indian interests will impact Pak-US relations – especially as India is not only a symbolic counter to Sunni militancy but also has pretensions to being a counter to possible growth of Chinese interests and presence in Afghanistan.

A fact that seems to be strangely missing from the calculus of all sides is that Pakistan will inevitably be the first victim of Sunni militancy if this menace makes an attempt to reach Indian territory.

Big US-China Showdown in Little South Asia

As tensions Washington and Beijing flare, how best can the South Asian countries position them for advantage?



By Zainb Umer

As the US-China tensions intensify by the day, smaller powers across the world are scrambling to align themselves to best suit their interests. The rivalry between the two leading powers of the world will play out in every region of the world, but South Asia will arguably be the hottest theatre of the showdown.

So how can the South Asian countries position themselves to for the coming confrontation between the US and China? According to the situation at hand, the smart decision for South Asian countries would be to lessen dependency on the two countries by strengthening relationships with non-traditional partners.

The rising tensions between the US and China have already affected South Asian countries both politically and economically.

Tensions between the two superpowers flared in July 2020 following the US decision to close down the Chinese consulate in Houston. Not afraid to retaliate, China responded by closing down the US consulate in Chengdu.

In January, the deal between China and the US was expected to end a two-year trade war between them. However, experts are skeptical the deal would ease the tensions.

The relations between the two countries further deteriorated after the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic. Washington and Beijing went on to accuse each other over the disease's origin and attempted cover-ups of the spread of the virus.

This has been made worse by the US's recent decision to invest heavily in weaponry and military capabilities in a bid to challenge China's moves in the South China Sea.

In recent political developments, South Asian countries should lessen their dependence on China and the US due to China's growing assertiveness in the region and growing distrust of the US as a security partner.

Even though regions want to enjoy the access to Chinese markets and Chinese investments, Chinese alleged expansionist

policy threatens the supremacy of South-east Asian countries. ASEAN countries seem more keen on the historical anti-Chinese sentiment reflecting worry over a more assertive China.

The same can be said for the US as South Asian regions want to remain under the protection of US Indo-Pacific Command however, fear that the US commitment might not be of a long-term nature. As can be seen through the US move of withdrawing from Afghanistan disregarding their ally India's heavy investments in Afghanistan.

The decision to withdraw troops from Afghanistan could signal unpredictable foreign policies that are formed under the influence of public opinion.

The current health and economic effects of the pandemic mean that the US government is more likely to adopt new priorities to combat the virus and solve its economic consequences.

This leaves the South Asian countries worrying in case Beijing becomes more

assertive in the South China Sea as the US becomes entangled with domestic issues.

The US-China tensions have greatly impacted the global economy, according to the United Nations, which has predicted that, if confrontation continues, it could slow global GDP growth to 1.8 percent. Tensions also suggest that cutting off of economic ties between the two superpowers is possible or already underway.

This decoupling could mean higher US tariffs on China, and the other way around. However, growing protectionism in the two countries would also disrupt broader South-east Asian access to the US market.

Decoupling could also lead to two trade blocs; one led by China and the other by the US. This could also prove to be troublesome for South Asian countries as political factors will be taken under consideration before conducting business with or invest-

ing in China and the US. This reality check should be an eye opener for South Asian countries to turn to safer and easier partners.

Some even put a different point of view forward saying that South Asian countries are potentially the winners out of the tensions arising due to trade diversion and manufacturing moving out of China. However, such views completely disregard the potential challenges and obstacles that would eventually face the South Asian regions.

Pakistan has maintained powerful relationships with both the US and China based on security, political, and economic interests. Current pillars of Pakistan's relationship with the US include Pakistan's ongoing cooperation in Afghanistan, which will be required well past the US military drawdown.

Even though military and economic aid has decreased, America still remains the largest export market for Pakistani goods and a choice education destination for the Pakistani elite.

According to an article by STIMSON, "Pakistani policymakers should adopt a cautious approach in managing bilateral relations with both strategically vital countries, and not be swayed into picking sides."

"The US should also seek to ensure that its own attempts to enhance its strategic cooperation with India do not compound Pakistan's regional insecurities and further push it towards China.

"It is now vital that the US avoid viewing its relationship with Pakistan primarily through a competitive China lens (similar to its myopic focus on Afghanistan) to avert dangerously straining the bilateral relationship."

Stuck with Lists

Pakistan needs to make a to-do list of its own to come off FATF's grey list to the UK's red list.

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The decision of the UK to keep Pakistan in 'red list' while moving India, Qatar, UAE, and Bahrain to amber left Pakistani diaspora in the UK fuming.

This was despite Pakistan having a lower seven day rolling average than many countries included in the amber list. For instance, India's seven day rolling average of positivity rate is 20 per 100,000 and rising as compared to Pakistan's 14 per 100,000 and rising.

The government has not shared the reasons to move some countries to the amber list, especially India as it is the source and hotspot of the delta variant, which has become the dominant variant in the UK, and keeping countries like Pakistan in the red list.

Unless the government shared the data and reasons for such a move, the decision is subject to speculation and open to all kinds of interpretations.

Looking at the recent history when Pakistan was put on the red list ahead of



India despite having much lower rate of infections raised questions and eyebrows. Many commentators and analysts had dubbed that decision as political and not scientific. The recent decision apparently reinforces that perception, and it is being interpreted in the same light.

This decision is a cause for concern for both Pakistan and the Pakistani diaspora living in the UK. The decision reflects the

diplomatic, economic, and political weight of the state of Pakistan as compared to other nations in general and to its neighbours.

This is also evident from the wish lists handed to Pakistan by FATF for it to come off its grey list. Despite Pakistan's exceptional achievements in meeting the toughest demands of FATF, Pakistan was asked to do more. As the recent history of last few

decades suggests there is always a 'to do more' list ready for Pakistan.

This has exhausted Pakistan, and it has forgotten about the real feel of freedom of action and policy. No matter how much we malign others for this ongoing predicament, the real responsibilities rest with Pakistan. It is the fruit of corruption, mismanagement, flawed and weak leadership, hotch-potch policies and lack of clear understanding of the direction the nation must take.

To fix that problem, Pakistan needs to put its house in order and pursue such policies that result in economic growth as well as resulting political and diplomatic clout. This is not easy and cannot be achieved quickly.

Given the below par political leadership largely tainted with corruption, weak and dysfunctional institutional set up, and lack of absorption capacity; this make any progress a wishful thinking.

What Pakistan needs is strong political will and for all the stakeholders in Pakistan undertake an urgent course correction. This and this alone can provide a solid foundation on which to build Pakistan's influence in the international sphere. Unless that happens there is no use making hue and cry on such decisions.

The red list decision reflects on the failure of diplomacy as well. The foreign missions need to be very proactive in understanding the internal dynamics of the countries they are based in and act accordingly to try

warding off adverse decisions and policies. They can also use the resources at hand in many countries in the shape of overseas Pakistanis, a resource most of the countries don't have the luxury to possess.

This decision also reflects badly on the political weight of Pakistani diaspora in the UK. This kind of decisions would have never been taken in such a way if the Pakistani community has an effective say and political weight in the UK.

This is despite several members of Parliament hail from the Pakistani community, and they are questioning the decisions along with their colleagues but to no avail. This decision may or may not change but the fact remains that the Pakistani community has least input in the political decision making.

The international response on Kashmir issue is also symptomatic of the same problem as both Pakistan and Pakistani diaspora have not been able to generate enough international pressure to stop Indian atrocities on the innocent Kashmiris.

This is a cause of concern as it bears directly and indirectly on the wellbeing of British Pakistanis in the future. It is about time Pakistanis woke up to the dire situation it is facing: They lack effective political and social clout.

This is not to diminish the efforts of some excellent parliamentarians. However, more needs to be done in the political sphere by

enhancing the quality of performance in the parliament and making people aware of the fast changing political and societal scene and inherent problems and opportunities in the emerging situation.

Much smaller minorities have much more influence and bigger say in the affairs of society. They need to work out the reasons for such a situation. If they can't work it out themselves, what they can do is at the very least follow the example of their Indian counterparts who invested heavily in their children's education.

They are now reaping the rewards of this course of action, their children occupying important positions of influence in various fields of life, and climbing the social ladder on the back of their social and economic success. They are emerging as middle and upper middle class in the UK.

In comparison, the situation of Pakistani diaspora is dismal. Most of them live around the poverty line with no or least emphasis on their children's education. This needs to change if they want respect and say in the society.

One of the reasons for such a poor state of the affairs is lack of effective political and social leadership who understand the problems and opportunities and act as a role model. The only reason for optimism here is that Pakistanis are a very resilient people and once they realise the problem, they always rise to the occasion and set things right.



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Kashmir Question Far from Settled

If Pakistan can get its act together and Kashmiris can keep their rage alive, there is no way India can maintain its draconian hold of Kashmir.

By Dr Moonis Ahmar

Two years after Narendra Modi's brazen move to purportedly absorb the occupied territory of Jammu & Kashmir into Indian union, questions continue to swirl around Pakistan's ambiguous policy position over the matter.

Why has a nuclear Pakistan failed to render any practical support to the beleaguered Kashmiris? Why has Pakistan's Kashmir policy been reduced to symbolism like issuing statements, holding protest marches, and so forth? Has Pakistan accepted India's revocation of article 370 and 35-A on 5 August 2019 as a fait accompli? What about Islamabad's principled support for the Kashmiris' right to self-determination?

Meanwhile, India has unleashed a reign of terror in the occupied territory in the form of extrajudicial killings, siege and search operations. Pakistan's symbolic move to mark 5 August as 'Youm e Isthasal e Kashmir' (Day of exploiting Kashmir) has failed to have any impact on New Delhi or the world at large.

India's shameless actions aiming to change the demography in the Muslim majority Valley of Kashmir by issuing thousands of domicile certificates to non-locals and patronizing the settlement of non-Muslims reflects India's growing sense of confidence in the nefarious enterprise.

The Kashmir conference held under the auspices of Modi regime in New Delhi in this June nothing but a cunning move to find willing collaborators among the Kashmiri leadership.

"Two years after the Indian parliament revoked the autonomous status of Indian-administered Kashmir, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government seems to have succeeded at bringing the region under its direct authority", said Anchal Vohra in an opinion piece carried by the Foreign Policy magazine.

The provocative title of the piece, carried on 3 August 2021, was, "Modi took complete control of Kashmir two years ago and got away with it".

Vohra said: "When India first made its move, it startled the world and led to fears of a rise in violence in the valley and a potential open conflict with Pakistan, the nuclear-armed state that claims sovereignty over Kashmir in its entirety.

"New Delhi also got worried about the diplomatic fallout with the West as Pakistan joined China in pressuring India through the United Nations Security Council. But there has neither been a war with Pakistan nor eruption of large-scale violence in the valley. Even condemnation from the international community has been cautiously worded and limited."

Does it mean that initial Indian concerns about an international pressure and surge of violence following its unilateral acts of 5 August 2019 were misplaced? Has the Modi regime managed to crush popular resentment of Muslim Kashmiris living under its occupation, while keeping Pakistan from rendering practical support to the Kashmiris?



If Muslim Kashmiris are facing the threat of demographic transformation in the Muslim majority Valley they are no more engaged in an armed conflict with around half a million Indian forces and seem to have been tamed.

It is obvious that given India's draconian hold, pro-Independence parties will not be able to pose any tangible challenge to India's collaborators. Anyway, controlling the land and not the hearts of Kashmiri Muslims appears to be the priority for the Modi regime.

When Kashmiri leaders like Mahbooba Mufti and Farooq Abdullah asked Modi in the New Delhi conference to restore special status of J&K, Modi assured them that once the situation returns to normalcy, something can be done to meet the aspirations of Kashmiri people.

Meanwhile, petitions challenging the revocation of article 370 are pending in the Indian Supreme Court for long with little likelihood of the 5 August 2019 acts being reversed through a judicial verdict.

Claims Vohra: "India has undoubtedly defeated Pakistan in this bout of their prolonged and intractable conflict. Islamabad fumbled while New Delhi rallied quiet support from the Western world and even brought the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia to temper Pakistan's expectations.

"The UAE has acknowledged it played a role in getting the two rivals to agree to a cease-fire. Over the last two years it has also become clear that Indian diplomats have crushed Pakistan's hopes of a UN-led plebiscite to settle the Kashmir dispute. But that does not mean India has eliminated all challenges".

Does it mean that Pakistan's Kashmir policy which is based on two major components to restore the status of Jammu & Kashmir to pre-5 August 2019 position and the resolve the Kashmir issue according to the UN Security Council resolution of 1948 and 1949 has been a failure?

One can figure out two major reasons for why Pakistan's Kashmir policy has failed to produce positive results. The first of these is the total lack of will and determination on the part of elites to render sacrifices for the cause of Kashmir.

When J&KLF in October 2019 announced that it plans to march towards Line of Control to express their solidarity with their compatriots holed up in the Indian occupied Valley, they were not allowed to proceed.

Islamabad feared retaliation from the Indian side in case J&KLF proceeded with its march and its inability to take that risk caused a major setback to Pakistan's policy of standing behind the Kashmiri people.

Symbolic gestures of supporting the Kashmiris also proved counter-productive as they exposed Pakistan's inability to render any practical support. Had Pakistan made it clear to India prior to 5 August 2019 that its crossing the red line will result in a massive retaliation, the Modi regime would have been restrained from taking that drastic action.



India's taking the seat as the President of the UN Security Council has further diminished the possibility of raising the Kashmir issue, at least during the month of August. The failure of Pakistan's Kashmir policy is also reflected in its failure to seek the support of permanent members of the UN Security Council against India's blatant violation of human rights and illegally annexing J&K.

The second reason for the failure of Pakistan's Kashmir policy is the economic dire straits the country is in. Till the time Pakistan is economically strong and politically stable it will not be able to put its Kashmir policy into practice.

If elites of Pakistan are unable to abandon their comfort zones and render practical support to the beleaguered people of J&K, it means letting them down. Holding of cease-fire along the LoC, thanks to the efforts of UAE, is not a solution to what the people of J&K are undergoing since 5 August 2019.

Already, the ground realities in Pakistan are such that India will continue to take advantage of Islamabad's vulnerability in the event of civil war in Afghanistan, domestic political squabbling and economic predicament.

When Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan during the election campaign in AJK stated that Kashmiris will be granted right to seek independence through a referendum if they acceded to Pakistan, his strange offer opened a new Pandora's box as his

proposal lacked domestic political support and raised legal complications.

Above all, it is obvious that India has managed to consolidate its hold over the Valley taking advantage of Pakistan's leadership crisis.

It is imperative that Pakistan overcome its adversities to pursue a successful Kashmir policy. It that can happen anytime soon and if Kashmiri leaders are united in their resolve to break free of the yoke of Indian bondage, the Modi regime will certainly be in deep trouble.

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

Greensill: David Cameron 'made \$10m' before company's collapse

David Cameron made about \$10m (£7m) from Greensill Capital before the finance company collapsed, documents obtained by BBC Panorama suggest.



TTI Report

The documents indicate the former prime minister received \$4.5m after cashing in Greensill shares in 2019. Greensill, which made its money by lending to businesses, went into administration in March, leaving investors facing billions in losses.

Mr Cameron's spokesman said his remuneration was a private matter. Greensill collapsed after its insurer refused to renew cover for the loans it was making. Before its collapse, Mr Cameron unsuccessfully tried to persuade ministers to invest taxpayers' money in Greensill loans.

He has since been cleared of breaking any lobbying rules, but MPs said the former prime minister showed a "significant lack of judgement". The details about Mr Cameron's shares were revealed in a letter from Greensill Capital to the former prime minister.

According to the letter, Mr Cameron was going to be paid \$4,569,851.60 (about £3.3m) after tax for a tranche of his Green-

sill shares. Panorama has not seen Mr Cameron's signed acceptance of the offer, but the letter records that he had already agreed to the deal. As well as the shares, Mr Cameron received a salary of \$1m (£720,000) a year as a part-time adviser.

The programme also understands that the former prime minister was paid a bonus of \$700,000 (£504,000) in 2019 on top of his salary. In total, it looks like he made around \$10m before tax for two-and-a-half years' part-time work. Mr Cameron's spokesman said: "He acted in good faith at all times and there was no wrongdoing in any of the actions he took."

Panorama has discovered how the company Mr Cameron promoted has left investors and UK taxpayers facing huge losses. Greensill Capital lent around \$5bn (£3.6bn) to GFG Alliance - a group of companies controlled by the steel magnate Sanjeev Gupta. GFG employs 35,000 people around the world, including more than 4,000 at steel mills in the UK.

Internal documents reveal that Greensill Capital knew GFG was in financial trouble by the start of 2020 because it was unable to make payments on Greensill loans. But Greensill used its own cash to cover repayments GFG could not afford - leaving investors unaware of the problems.

An email sent by a Greensill finance officer to a senior manager in April 2020 said that the unusual payments had been going on for four months. It said: "We are constantly plugging holes that GFG cannot afford to repay... It is not even robbing Peter to pay Paul, it is just recirculation of Greensill funds."

A second email sent at the start of May suggests an insolvency practitioner should be sent in to review Mr Gupta's businesses. It said: "It may well be that administration is required." Instead of raising the alarm about GFG's inability to make loan payments, Greensill Capital looked for a new investor. It turned to the UK government - and David Cameron was sent in to try to make it happen.

Mr Cameron sent 56 messages lobbying ministers and senior civil servants. He wanted the Bank of England to invest more than £10bn of taxpayers' money in Greensill's loans. The Bank of England turned Greensill down, but in June 2020 Greensill was approved as a lender under a government scheme designed to get emergency cash to companies affected by the coronavirus pandemic.

The Coronavirus Large Business Interruption Loan (CLBIL) scheme run by the government-owned British Business Bank allowed Greensill to make loans backed by an 80% taxpayer guarantee.

Greensill was only supposed to lend a maximum of £50m to a single borrower or group of companies under the CLBIL scheme. But Greensill Capital lent Mr Gupta's GFG Alliance £350m by making seven taxpayer-backed loans of £50m to seven of his companies. Greensill also made an eighth loan of £50m to another company closely associated with Mr Gupta.

The companies have all failed to make repayments on the taxpayer-backed loans. The government guarantee has been suspended while the loans are investigated - but that is being challenged and the taxpayer could still lose £320m. Mr Gupta's company, GFG Alliance, and its financing arrangements with Greensill Capital, are now being investigated by the Serious Fraud Office.

GFG Alliance said it takes the investigation seriously and that all allegations of improper conduct are denied in the strongest terms. The company said it has been working tirelessly to stabilise the businesses affected by the collapse of Greensill and deliver refinancing.

GFG said: "We remain fully committed to UK industry and to a solution that will enable GFG to repay creditors and create a sustainable future for its UK businesses." Lex Greensill, the founder of Greensill Capital, said the government guarantee on the loans should not be withdrawn.

"Our access to any government-backed schemes with respect to funding our clients has always drawn upon robust advice from leading law firms to ensure Greensill complied with relevant rules," he said.

He also said he was not aware his staff had recommended sending in an insolvency practitioner to GFG. Mr Cameron's spokesman said he was not involved in lending decisions and had no knowledge of GFG's financial situation. "He was a part-time adviser to the company - one of several - and had no Executive or Board responsibilities whatsoever," he said.

"He made the representations he did to the UK government not just because he thought it would benefit the company, but because he sincerely believed there would be a material benefit for UK businesses at a challenging time." Panorama has also discovered how investors were misled about Greensill Capital's investments.



Greensill made money through supply chain finance - which involves making loans to companies that are waiting for invoices to be paid by their customers. When the invoices were paid, the cash would be there to pay investors back, with interest.

To fund the loans, it teamed up with Swiss bank Credit Suisse, which raised \$10bn from investors. It was the Swiss bank's job to market and sell the Greensill investments, and to inform investors about potential risks. Investors thought their cash was safe, because it was supposed to be secured against the unpaid invoices.

But this year it was revealed that some of the invoices simply did not exist. US court papers show how between 2018 and 2021, Greensill lent \$850m of investors' cash to a US coal company called Bluestone

Resources. Only \$70m of that money was secured against real invoices for coal that Bluestone had actually sold.

Investors did not know it, but the remaining \$780m was only backed by predicted coal sales that may or may not happen in the future. Lex Greensill told Panorama that this type of financing was commonplace in the financial services industry.

He said the predicted Bluestone business was all "based upon future trade that is likely to occur with current customers". Panorama discovered that was not true. The programme obtained the names of the companies that Lex Greensill said were current customers of Bluestone.

Six of the companies said they were not Bluestone customers and they weren't planning to buy its coal in the future. Lex Greensill later told Panorama the coal buyers did not have to be current customers. Bluestone only had to state it expected to make the sales at some future point and Greensill was not obliged to make checks, he said.

Mr Greensill denied misleading investors. He said his company made all the appropriate disclosures to Credit Suisse and the Swiss Bank was "solely responsible for making any disclosures to their investors". He said the loans were always secured against assets and personal guarantees, and were backed up by insurance that would pay 100% of any shortfall.

Credit Suisse says its focus is on returning cash to investors and that 59% has been returned so far.

Delta Variant on the Rampage

The most virulent strain of Coronavirus so far that first rose in India is sweeping Pakistan.



By Noor Aftab

The fourth wave of the pandemic has continued its upward trajectory in Pakistan, with 5,661 cases reported on 7 August – surpassing the highest number of daily cases (5,112) recorded on 29 April. Also on 7 August, Pakistan recorded 95 deaths from coronavirus, the highest single-day toll during the ongoing fourth wave of the pandemic.

The latest surge is blamed on the Delta variant, originally detected in India a few months ago, along with lax social attitudes and increased activity around Eidul Azha. The confirmed cases in Pakistan are 1,058,405 while 4,157 patients are in critical condition.

A total of 23,702 patients have died and 954,711 recovered from this disease. The government has so far conducted 16,336,171 tests across the country.

The number of patients is 361,458 in Punjab; 394,748 in Sindh; 147,026 in KP; 30,967 in Balochistan; 89,569 in Islamabad; 26,086 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK); and 8,551 in Gilgit-Baltistan.

According to National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), currently compliance with Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) is 56.4 percent in Islamabad; 46.6 percent in KP; 42.7 in AJK; 37.4 percent in GB; 38 percent in Punjab; and 33 percent each in Sindh and Balochistan.

Shortage of vaccine

There was a shortage of Sinopharm, Sinovac, and AstraZeneca vaccines in Karachi, as thousands of people started arriving at vaccination centres daily. The Health Department officials said vaccine reserves were exhausted at the Expo Centre, Dow Ojha Hospital, and Sindh Government Children's Hospital, while supplies to inoculation centres at New Karachi, Liaquatabad, and Lyari were suspended. Vaccination centres were overrun after the government announced penalties for the unvaccinated people, including blocking mobile SIMs and non-entry to offices, restaurants, shopping malls, and transport.

New restrictions

The NCOC has announced revised restrictions for a number of cities as the fourth wave of the coronavirus continues its momentum in the country.

The new restrictions, which would last till 31 August, were imposed in Rawalpindi, Lahore, Faisalabad and Multan in Punjab; Peshawar and Abbottabad in KP; Karachi and Hyderabad in Sindh (after the partial lockdown ended on 8 August); Muzaffarabad and Mirpur in AJK; Gilgit and Skardu in the GB; and Islamabad Capital Territory.

The decisions included scaling back market closure timings from 10pm to 8pm; closure of indoor dining (outdoor dining (till 10 pm), takeaway and delivery will continue); resumption of 50 percent work-from-home policy; public transport to operate with 50 percent occupancy; and two days in a week to be observed as safe days with provinces free to choose.

Deadline for 'high risk' sectors

The NCOC has decided to set a 31 August vaccination deadline for 'high risk' sectors. The students above 18 years of age, those working in the transport sector, public sector employees, law enforcement agencies, and staff working at hotels, restaurants, wedding halls, shopping malls and banks will have to get inoculated by this date.

Health experts have said the pace of vaccination should be further expedited to avoid the chances of creation of the vaccine-resistant virus. Whenever the number of cases started declining, a new variant of Covid-19 having a higher transmission rate emerged and then positivity started increasing again.

Covid-19 is comparatively a bigger virus and it has 39,000 positions for mutations and 20,000 positions for variations. The Delta (Indian) variant has emerged after two mutations and this is why it is called double mutant virus.

Increasing variants

Coronavirus constantly changes itself through mutation that is why its new variants have emerged in short span of time. Multiple variants of the virus that cause Covid-19 have been documented all over the world including the United States, India, the United Kingdom, South Africa and Brazil.

These include Alpha, Beta, Gamma, Delta, Epsilon and Lambda variants. Alpha variant was first detected in the United States in December 2020. It was initially detected in the United Kingdom.

Beta variant was first detected in the United States at the end of January 2021. It was initially detected in South Africa in December 2020.

Gamma variant was first detected in the United States in January 2021. It was initially identified in travellers from Brazil, who were tested during routine screening at an airport in Japan in early January.

Delta variant was first detected in the United States in March 2021. It was initially identified in India in December 2020.

Delta plus has also been detected in several other regions, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Portugal, Russia and China.

Japanese researchers have found that the Lambda variant, which was initially discovered in Peru and is now spreading throughout South America, is highly transmissible and more resistant to vaccines than the initial Covid-19 strain.

These variants seem to spread more easily and quickly than other variants, which may lead to more cases of Covid-19. An increase in the number of cases will put more strain on healthcare resources, lead to more hospitalizations, and potentially more deaths.

South Korea's Disease Control and Prevention Agency said that it had recorded at least two cases of the new Delta Plus variant, which some experts believe to be more transmissible than the original delta variant that was first detected in India and has since thwarted plans for returning to normal life.

The 'Plus' in the variant's name refers to its K417N spike protein mutation, which was also found in some sub-strains of the Alpha variant.

The health ministry informed that as long as the coronavirus is around and a good portion of the population is unvaccinated, the virus would continue to mutate.

Is booster dose needed?

As many as 80 percent of medical professionals and health experts at a recent conference in Islamabad said they had managed to get themselves inoculated with more than one vaccine against Covid-19 and its variants, amid a raging question by many if we really need a booster dose or a mix and match of vaccines to protect people against the dreadfully infectious disease.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan has strongly opposed the idea of 'top-up' doses and maintained that at the moment there is no reason for allowing people to get an additional dose of the same or other vaccines when only a fraction of the country's population has been vaccinated and millions of adults are still waiting for their first vaccination.

He said Covid-19 vaccines must only be used to inoculate the large segment of society still unvaccinated. A leading health expert and principal investigator of clinical trials of different Covid-19 vaccines, Prof Javed Akram has said no concrete data is currently available to support additional immunity by a mix and match of different vaccines or boosters to a fully vaccinated person and even the World Health Organization (WHO) is also opposing this idea.

Solution not an end

The pandemic is still far from over, but glimpses of its legacy are emerging. Up until now, whenever the world has thought the virus has been beaten back, a new variant has come storming back, more infectious than the last.

The medical experts warn that the last phase of the pandemic may be drawn-out and painful; and that Covid-19 would leave behind a different world. They say the vaccines, which so far have proved highly effective at preventing severe Covid-19 illness, are making their way into millions of arms each day and that is likely to have an impact in terms of keeping hospitalizations and deaths under better control.

There is a growing evidence that vaccines are effective, as real-world data from all over the globe validate the clinical-trial results by showing a sharp reduction in hospitalizations and deaths. Emerging evidence also indicates that vaccines likely reduce transmission considerably, though not to the same degree that they prevent severe disease.

More vaccines are coming as Johnson & Johnson's one-shot vaccine appears to be highly effective against severe Covid-19 and received Emergency Use Authorization in the United States. Novavax's vaccine is now in Phase III trials; preliminary results suggest it was highly effective against the coronavirus disease.

Some researchers say Covid-19 probably will become endemic, meaning it will always be around – without causing a public health emergency. They say the people should not count on the elimination of Covid-19, though the fact that the virus seems to be exclusive to humans does make eradication a possibility.

A Prize (Bond) Blooper

When an official document cites discontinued bond denominations as extant, there is huge potential for abuse.

By Zain Rihat

When somebody tries to sell you securities that have been withdrawn, it is fraud. But what do you call it when an authentic official document lists such securities among those available for sale?

An official document ancillary to the federal budget for the current fiscal incorrectly lists among “bearer type non-terminable securities freely en-cashable and transferable by delivery” national prize bonds in the denominations of PKR 7,500, 15,000, 25,000 and 40,000.

The fact is, National Prize Bonds in denomination of PKR 40,000, 25,000, 15,000, and 7,500 were withdrawn in two phases over the last two years by the Federal Government through State Bank of Pakistan.

The PKR 40,000 prize bond was withdrawn during financial year 2019-20 and the people brought bags of these to get them cashed or changed from the banks.

Official document “Pakistan Economic Survey 2020-21” issued by the Finance Division Government of Pakistan, traditional ahead of the announcement of new federal budget in the second week of June 2021, in its Chapter on Public Debt, says (correctly): “The PKR 25000, PKR 15000 and PKR 7500 denomination prize bonds were withdrawn from circulation in order to improve the documentation of the economy. The holders have been given options to (i) convert to premium prize bonds; or (ii) replace them with eligible

National Savings Certificates; or (iii) en-cash at face value into their bank accounts”.

The State Bank of Pakistan had fixed the deadline of 31 May 2021, prior to which the holders of prize bonds in these denominations could get their prize bonds changed or cashed.

However, “Federal Budget 2021-22 Explanatory Memorandum on Federal Receipts”, issued by the Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad, states on its page 49 (incorrectly): “National Prize Bonds; These are of bearer type non-terminable securities freely en-cashable and transferable by delivery. These are issued in denomination of PKR 100, PKR 200, PKR 750, PKR 1500, PKR 1500, PKR 7,500, PKR 15,000, PKR 25,000 and PKR 40,000.”

National Prize Bonds are the saving instrument of choice for Pakistan’s lower and middle class. First introduced in 1960, they have been issued in various denominations including PKR 100, 200, 750, 1500, 7500, 15000, 25,000, and 40,000. (The last four denominations – PKR 40,000, 25,000, 15,000, and 7,500 – have since been discontinued.)

While this may look like a minor error to some, this opens a potential loophole for abuse by unscrupulous elements. Who is to blame for this misleading information given in the official document? Can the authorities envision any corrective action for this blooper?



Rats and Moles in Our Midst

While it is good to know our counterintelligence is working, this is no occasion for complacency.

By Asadullah

Shocking as the recent news of busting of multiple networks of foreign intelligence moles operating within the country's most sensitive departments are, they are reassuring in equal measure: "We know for certain our counterintelligence machine is working."

In the two cases that came to light over the last couple of months, the moles siphoning off sensitive information were caught because of their frequent meetings with the diplomats and for their extravagant lifestyles. Some of them are highly qualified and have impressive profiles and family histories.

An espionage network recently unearthed working in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Defence Production was monitoring China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and defence procurements.

In June, a deputy director working on the Chinese Desk at the ministry of foreign affairs was caught spying for Russian intelligence. The official, Syed Qalb-e-Abbas, is a BS-18 officer of the Ministry of Planning and Development and was working in the Foreign Ministry on deputation.

He started his career as Research Officer in the now devolved Ministry of Food, Agriculture and Livestock in early 2000. He later became section officer in the Economic Affairs Division and was associated with the section that deals with the United Nations and Foreign Training. Since September 2018, he was working as Deputy Director China Division.

Another ring of informants found working for a European intelligence agency has at least 20 members. Counterintelligence sleuths have been able to nail nine of them so far, two of whom have applied for bail after arrest.

The court record shows that the accused serving and retired officials of the Ministry of Defence Production and private contractors dealing with the defence related purchases were involved in stealing secret information and sharing this with the agent of a foreign intelligence agency.

The accused arrested so far in this case are Safdar Rehman, Tafzeelur Rehman, Mohammad Waqar, Mohammad Ashfaq, Mohammad Tahir, Mujtaba Hussain, Mohammad Ashraf, retired Lt-Col Irfan Hameed Kiani, and Ahmed Kiani.

Col Kiani, who was compulsory retired from the in 1993, entered into the defence indenting business. He represented various companies from Turkey, China, Brazil, and Russia in Pakistan.

The Kianis' company, The Core Group, has been involved with several defence and energy sector projects. It claims representation of various manufacturers in Asia, Europe, and Americas in brands, commodities, technology and infrastructure.

The Kianis comes from an illustrious family of soldiers. Col Kiani's father Major General Hameed Asghar Kiani honourably served Pakistan Army and fought the 1965 and 1971 wars, and his grandfather Raja Gulab Khan was a decorated member of the British Indian Army. His father-in-law Major General Khudadad Khan was also a highly decorated officer in the Pak Army.

Col Kiani was the first Pakistani national to be awarded the prestigious "National Do Cruzeiro Do Sul" by the Brazilian Government in the year 2015. Among other laureates of the award have been Queen Elizabeth and some US Presidents.

Ahmed Kiani has and MPhil. from the University of London and a PhD from



University of Cambridge. He is a director of the family owned company Core Corporation.

As per the allegations, Col Kiani and his son Ahmed Kiani have been receiving secret/confidential documents from the accused Safdar in order to provide the same to foreign intelligence agents.

The FIA recovered confidential documents related to defence purchases and defence production from their custody as well. Moreover, the electronic devices/gadgets were also recovered from their possession and have been sent for forensic analysis.

Col Kiani and Ahmed Kiani, both held at Rawalpindi Central Jail, Adiala, applied for bail before the IHC.

In response to their petition, the additional attorney general Qasim Wadud appeared on behalf of federal government. He filed an application that stated that the federal government intends to place some highly sensitive information on judicial record and requested the court for in-camera session to hear the stance of the government.

While it is reassuring to see these moles in our midst caught, this is no occasion for complacency. The only thing we can be certain of is that these were not the last of foreign intel assets embedded in our institutions. The authorities must redouble their efforts to smoke out all the rats gnawing at the very fabric of our state.

Equally important, we must suss out the circumstances that led these persons to

work against the interests of their own nation. After all, most of the people accused in these cases were in the service of Pakistan and almost all had respectable and comfortable lives.

While some of them may have been motivated by their sheer greed, others may have been trapped by their foreign handlers. Did the lax morals of some of them led them to be filmed in compromising positions, opening them up to blackmail? Were some honey-trapped?

We must suss out the precise circumstances of each case and draw lessons to harden our bureaucracy against penetration by foreign intelligence services.

Three Intel Pharma Companies Earn \$25 Billion in 6 Months Just Because of Covid

In 2021, American pharma company, Pfizer alone has estimated record income of about \$33 billion.

By Javed Mahmood

ISLAMABAD: Multinational pharmaceutical companies have minted billions of dollars in just first six months of 2021 mainly because of sale of their Covid vaccines and other coronavirus-related products. Pfizer, BioNTech, and Moderna have reported \$25 billion income from Jan-June 2021.

For the full year (2021), these companies have revised upward their projected income because of growing demand of Covid vaccines and other related medical products throughout the world. Hence, in the second half of 2021, their earnings will be much greater than first six months of the calendar year.

Germany's BioNTech, maker with partner Pfizer of the pioneering mRNA jab, raised its vaccine revenue forecast for 2021 in its latest earnings report on Monday.

US firm Pfizer and BioNTech got a headstart over their competitors because they were the first in the western world to announce positive results from clinical trials of their vaccine last year and got



regulatory approval from the governments and the World Health Organisation. They were also first to get authorisation from US and European Union regulators to sell their shot.

Pfizer is leading the market with highest income than all of its international rivals. Pfizer has earned more than its competitors, raking in \$10.8 billion in the first half of this year.

Interestingly, the US company has raised its outlook for 2021, expecting to earn \$33.5 billion in sales for the full year.

BioNTech today reported revenues of \$8.54 billion 7.3 billion euros in the first half. Unlike its larger partner, the company's only product on sale is the coronavirus vaccine. BioNTech expects vaccine revenues to reach 15.9 billion euros for the full year, up from a previous estimate of 9.8 billion euros.

US startup Moderna is the only other firm to have produced an authorised mRNA vaccine so far.

Messenger RNA technology works by providing human cells with the genetic instructions to make a surface protein of the coronavirus, which trains the immune

system to recognise the real virus.

Like BioNTech, the company's only product in the market is the Covid vaccine. The vaccine requires two shots taken weeks apart. Moderna reported turnover of \$5.9 billion in the first six months of the year. It expects to make \$20 billion in revenues thanks to the vaccine this year.

British pharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca and US firm Johnson & Johnson had their vaccines approved by the EU later than their rivals.

Interestingly, the United Kingdom's AstraZeneca and Belgium's Johnson and Johnson vaccine got approvals much later than American companies — Pfizer, BioNTech. Consequently, earnings of AstraZeneca and Johnson & Johnson are much far less than American pharma giants.

AstraZeneca's vaccine is one of the world's leading vaccines and has been vital in the UK's speedy vaccination drive — which enabled England's economy to fully reopen this month.

But it has not been approved by US drug regulators. Johnson & Johnson's vaccine — made by Janssen, its Belgian subsidiary —

has the advantage of being administered with one shot instead of two like those of its rivals.

AstraZeneca and J&J do not use mRNA technology. They both made more traditional viral vector vaccines, which use genetically-engineered version of a common-cold causing adenovirus as a “vector” to shuttle genetic instructions into human cells.

The two companies also vowed to sell their vaccines at cost during the pandemic, meaning they would not earn profits from them. They are cheaper than the Pfizer/BioNTech and Moderna jabs, which reflects in their revenues.

AstraZeneca's Covid jab generated \$1.2 billion in sales in the first six months of the year. J&J reported \$264 million in sales and expects to make \$2.5 billion for the full year. AstraZeneca has not provided a detailed full-year estimate.

So far, more than 4.3 million people have died due to coronavirus globally while 203 million people have faced this virus. As the fresh Indian Delta variant is going on throughout the world, it will affect more people.



Pakistanis celebrate Independence Day with traditional fervor



Pakistanis celebrated their 74th Independence Day on August 14 with traditional fervor and enthusiasm across the country. Every year, the people celebrate Pakistan's Independence Day by participating in gatherings that highlight significance of independence, herald national flags on top of their homes, and offices national flags. Meanwhile, youngsters display national flags on cars, motorbikes and take round of roads and streets in cities and towns to express their happiness that Independence gave them. On 14th of August, 1947, Pakistan appeared on the world atlas after Partition of Hindustan.

Independence Day, observed annually on 14 August, is a national holiday in Pakistan, commemorating the day when Pakistan achieved independence and was declared a sovereign nation, following the end of the British Raj in 1947. Pakistan came into existence as a result of the Pakistan Movement that aimed at the creation of an independent Muslim state by division of the north-western region of the South Asia and was led by All-India Muslim League under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah. The event was brought forth by the Indian Independence

Act 1947 in which the British Indian Empire gave independence to the Dominion of Pakistan (later the Islamic Republic of Pakistan) which included the West Pakistan (present Pakistan) and East Pakistan (now Bangladesh).

In the Islamic calendar, the day of independence coincided with Ramadan 27, the eve of which is regarded as sacred by Muslims. The main ceremony takes place in Islamabad, where the national flag is hoisted at the Presidential and Parliament buildings, which is followed by the national anthem, and live televised speeches by leaders. Usual celebratory events this day include flag-raising ceremonies, parades, cultural events, and the playing of patriotic songs. A number of award ceremonies are often held on this day, and citizens often hoist the national flag atop their homes or display it prominently on their vehicles and attire.

Every year on August 14th, Pakistan gets decked up in all its glory to celebrate its Independence Day with incredible pomp and show. Every Pakistani's heartthrobs with a sentiment of patriotism and unity; and remembering the freedom fighters and great leaders like Quaid-e-Azam who made it possible for the Indian Muslims to live

peacefully and independently in a separate motherland, today known as Pakistan.

Pakistan's Independence Day (August 14th) holds extreme importance for every Pakistani national. Just a mention of this day saturates the psyches and spirits of the inhabitants with great self-esteem and patriotic elation. Flag-raising ceremonies, fireworks, parties, parades, marches, cultural events, and patriotic songs are a big part of the Pak Independence Day.

- The Pakistan's Independence Day dawns with a 31 guns salute in Islamabad, the federal capital and 21 gun salute in all four provincial headquarters. Prayers are offered across the country, for its security, progress, development, and people's wellbeing. Pakistan's National Flag has hoisted at all private and public buildings.
- The main highlight of the Pakistan Independence Day celebrations is the National Flag hoisting ceremony at Jinnah Convention Centre in Islamabad, with honorable President and Prime Minister as the chief guests of the event. They unfurl the national flag as the participants stand and sing together the national anthem.

- Similar flag hoisting ceremonies and independence special events are held at all provincial, divisional and district headquarters. The Pakistan Air Force put on a marvelous air show, with Pakistani, Saudi, and Turkish warrior planes flying over Islamabad as a huge number of onlookers watch from one of the city's parks.
- The Pakistan Independence Day Parade, also known as the "Azadi Parade" is one of the major highlights of the day. The Azadi Parade is mostly held at Pakistan Military Academy Kakul.
- Karachi hosts the biggest Independence Special events and programmes, with a

parade at the mausoleum of Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the major climax of the day. Thousands of visitors pay respects to late Muhammad Ali Jinnah at his tomb in Karachi.

- The people of Pakistan celebrate 14th August with utmost enthusiasm, zeal, and fervor. The streets, towns, and houses are beautifully decorated with green and white lights and national flag pennants. Many public and private buildings, as well as streets and Bazars, are profusely illuminated. Posters, banners, and portraits of founding fathers are also seen everywhere as part of the Pakistan Independence Day celebration.

- The Pakistan Prime Minister delivers an incredible speech on this auspicious occasion addressing the nation and its citizens. The PM pays tribute to the ancient leaders of the Pakistan Independence Movement and all those brave sons of the soil who sacrificed their lives to win freedom for their country. The PM also lays emphasis on unity, strength, and hard work.
- Fireworks, exhibitions, game shows, and face-painting are also a staple of Independence Day celebrations in Pakistan, with main events being held in cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, and Peshawar.



The Wrecking Ball of the IMF Program

The IMF Program has played havoc with Pakistan's economy, says senior economist Dr Ashfaq H. Khan.



By Dr Ashfaq H. Khan

The twin policies of rupee devaluation and raising discount rate to curb inflation have cost Pakistan PKR 6,353 billion in about three years, according to Dr Ashfaq H. Khan. This works out to approximately USD 40 billion for a USD 6 billion IMF Program.

“The nation has paid a heavy price of these misconstrued policies”, says the current Principal and Dean of the School of Social Sciences & Humanities (S3H), NUST, Islamabad. “People who landed by helicopter had little or no idea about the statistics of Pakistan. They have never studied Pakistan’s economy.”

“They brought the knowledge of Western economies and policies and brutally implemented the same in a developing country like Pakistan. Such policies have severely damaged the economy, dented the popularity of the Prime Minister and put the government on the back foot, trying to hide behind inheritance.”

In a powerful op-ed piece published by the SOUTHASIA magazine, the veteran economist cites hard data to demolish two key precepts of the policy prescribed by International Monetary Fund (IMF) for Pakistan: market-based exchange rate (read rupee devaluation) and a tight monetary policy (read policy rate hikes to curb inflation).

Khan says the IMF policy prescriptions call for tightening of monetary policy, that is, raising the discount rate as fast as possible. “Since the discount rate serves as a benchmark for all the lending rates, private sector investment declines, which, in turn, reduces import demand,” said Dr Khan.

“Since developing countries’ economic activity depends principally on imported raw materials, imported capital goods, imported machinery and equipment and imported energy, any decline in imports slows down the economic activity. In other words, demand destruction is achieved by chocking the economic activities of the country.”

Another intervention the IMF advocates to reduce current account imbalance is currency devaluation. “Devaluation increases the landed cost of all the imported items, including inputs for the production process. Higher cost of imported items not only discourages its consumption but also increases the cost of production.”

“Hence, lower import slows economic growth. Since devaluation is also inflationary by definition, the Central Bank justifies tightening of monetary policy (i.e., raising discount rate) to contain inflationary pressures.”

He pointedly notes the paradox of creating inflation through devaluation and then trying to control inflation by raising discount rate. “Higher interest rate, on the other hand, increases cost of borrowing of the government to finance fiscal deficit and therefore, increases interest payment.”

“In the absence of commensurate rise in

revenue, the overall fiscal deficit increases. Hence, an irrelevant tax target is given under the IMF program to achieve targeted fiscal deficit.

“The government is also being asked to raise utility prices, supposedly to improve the financial health of the utility companies, but actually it also increases the cost of production.”

The Program thus increases the cost of production, making the industry non-competitive in the international market as well as raising public debt. “A higher interest rate increases cost of capital; devaluation increases cost of imported inputs; higher utility prices (gas, electricity) and irrelevant revenue targets further burden the industry with tax incidence.



“Devaluation accompanied by higher interest rate drowns the country into debt.”

Khan shows that the SBP assumption that there is an inverse relationship between discount rate and inflation is patently wrong as there is a strong positive relationship between the two.

“[Whenever] discount rate is raised, CPI-based inflation rises accordingly... When [interest] is raised, the cost of borrowing goes up and, accordingly, it is passed on to the consumers.”

“Recent empirical evidence in the case of Pakistan suggests that a one percent increase in discount (policy) rate causes CPI-based inflation to rise by 1.3 percent. In other words, there is a strong positive relationship in Pakistan between the discount (policy)

rate and CPI-based inflation.”

“The Governor of SBP had stated several times during the release of monetary policy statements that inflation in Pakistan is a supply side phenomenon followed by the rise of government administered prices (prices of gas, electricity, etc.) and yet he continued to use the demand side instrument (discount rate) to contain inflation.”

“He failed to see the composition of the CPI-basket where almost 35 percent contribution comes from food items followed by the prices of gas, electricity, fuel, water and house rent (24%).”

“Thus, almost three-fourths of the CPI basket is not affected by discount rate at all and yet our Central Bank continues to use this instrument to control inflation.”

“This misconstrued policy alone added Rs. 1687 billion to interest payment from July 2018 till March 2020. It has simply eroded fiscal space and contributed immensely in widening fiscal deficit and raising public debt.”

“The high interest rate policy on the other hand attracted ‘Hot Money’, or in the short term ‘Treasury Bills’, which benefited foreigners immensely by damaging the local economy. The high interest policy attracted ‘Hot Money’ by putting the domestic economy in cold storage.”

“High interest rate policy certainly did not reduce inflation but it contributed to a rise in interest payment, deterioration in fiscal balance, addition to public debt, reducing investment, slowing economic growth, raising unemployment and poverty, reduc-

ing tax collection and so on. Who is responsible for this damage to the economy?”

Moving on to the policy of market-based exchange rate, Khan says, “We have been told by the SBP and its Governor that devaluation would improve the competitiveness of our industry abroad and hence would help increase exports.”

He again uses empirical data show that our exports have remained invariant to the adjustment of the exchange rate. “Based on over 100 months of exports and exchange rate numbers, it is clear that our exports have moved in a narrow monthly range of \$1.7 billion to \$2.3 billion, irrespective of exchange rate, whether it is Rs. 60 per dollar or Rs. 160 per dollar.”

“I have been arguing time and again that by adjusting its exchange rate, Pakistan cannot increase its exports. Devaluation raises input cost of export-oriented industries and makes them non-competitive.”

“According to Dr. Ishrat Hussain, close to 60 percent of the inputs to export-oriented industries are imported, hence devaluation raises their costs and makes them non-competitive.”

“While devaluation failed to increase exports, it certainly added Rs. 4666 billion to public debt without borrowing a single dollar during July 2018 to March 2020...”

“Devaluation simply caused public debt to rise without increasing a single dollar in exports... Who has paid the price of this misconstrued policy? Naturally, this government and the people of Pakistan.”

Says Dr Khan, “One of the helicopter persons has left the government and the remaining one should have the moral courage to leave, particularly after the statement of the current Finance Minister when he said (of course, before taking charge of the ministry) that the two and a half years of economic policies have grossly damaged the economy of Pakistan.”

In conclusion, he reiterates that the neo-liberal economic order as implemented vigorously by the IMF has never worked in the past and will not work in the future.

“A home-grown reform agenda and policies are the solution to address the balance of payments crisis...”

Reign of Inflation?

Roaring inflation has been the hallmark of Imran Khan's PTI-led government so far.



If one was asked to pinpoint one defining characteristic of Prime Minister Imran Khan's economic policy (or lack thereof), it would be runaway inflation. Does the Prime Minister and his economic team realise how this monster is eating up the common man's income?

In the three years of the PTI government, inflation has consistently beat the target. The prices of sugar, flour, rice, and eggs prices are a good measure of how much the prices of essential consumer items have increased in the last three years.

In August 2018, the PTI came to power and at that time the retail price of sugar was 60 rupees per kg, flour (fine) was available at 40 rupees while chakki flour price at that time was 50 rupees a kg while eggs were being sold at 130 rupees/dozen that too in winter seas and in summer their prices remained below 100 rupees per dozen.

However, soon after the formation of the PTI government, prices started surging consistently. Consequently, retail price of sugar increased beyond 100 rupees, flour (fine) hit 80 rupees, chakki flour price mounted to 90-95 rupees/kg while eggs set a new record by surpassing 200 rupees a dozen last winter.

These days, retail prices of eggs are still

over 160 rupees/dozen. Importantly, none of these consumer is directly linked to devaluation of rupee. The situation of other essential consumer items has been no different, which have together pushed the inflation rate beyond the target set by the government every year.

For example, in 2020-21, the average rate of inflation rose to 8.9 percent against the annual target of 6.5 percent. Food inflation is also fluctuating in the double digit because of multiple reasons.

For the year 2021-22, the government projected 8 percent inflation while in July it ended at 8.6 percent, little above the government's threshold. In the month of July, the first month of the ongoing financial year 2021-22, inflation ended at 8.4 percent.

In comparison with 9.7 percent inflation in June, the graph of price hike has slightly declined, led by a decrease in prices of agricultural products because of better output of edible crops.

The fact is that in the past two years, the subdued production of sugar and wheat triggered food inflation while the government increased prices of petroleum products substantially, causing a rise in non-food inflation. Food inflation is still at

a higher level. For instance, in urban areas, it jumped by 9.4 percent in July on a yearly basis and 1.5 percent on a monthly basis, whereas the respective price level growth in rural areas was at 7.3 percent and 1.6 percent.

Meanwhile, in 2020-21, the government could not keep inflation under check in its third year too, which accelerated to nearly 9 percent, significantly higher than the official target of 6.5 percent that became the biggest challenge for the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

During fiscal year 2020-21, the average rate of inflation rose to 8.9 percent. It was the third successive year when the Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government could not achieve its annual target due to cost-push factors.

Because the government's decision to increase administrative prices like electricity, gas, petroleum products, and a weak control over food items prices triggered inflation during 2020-21.

The average inflation rate in urban areas was 8.2 percent in the last fiscal year but it remained over 10 percent in the rural parts of the country, affecting people with lesser income the most.

Although the average rate of increase in inflation almost touched 9 percent, the annual inflation rate decelerated for the second month in a row to 9.7 percent in June over a year ago.

This was because of reduction in prices of food commodities in both urban and rural areas. But the non-food inflation increased in both urban and rural parts in the last month.

The Pakistan Bureau of Statistics reported that the prices remained significantly high in both rural areas and the cities, although the pace of increase was slower than the preceding month but still close to double digits. The inflation rate in both urban and rural areas remained at 9.7 percent in June.

The food inflation rate in cities dropped from 15.3 percent to 11 percent and in villages and towns from 12.8 percent to 9.8 percent. But non-food item prices remained elevated both in rural areas at 9.7 percent and in urban areas at 8.9 percent.

Core inflation - calculated by excluding food and energy items - decelerated slightly to 6.7 percent in urban areas in June and to 7.1 percent in rural parts, reported the national data collecting agency.

The food group saw a price increase of 10.5 percent in June from the same month a year ago. Within the food group, prices of non-perishable food items rose 12.9 percent on an annualised basis. But the prices of perishable goods decreased 3.9 percent last month.

The inflation rate for the housing, water, electricity, gas and fuel group - having one-fourth weight in the basket - increased to 9.1 percent last month. Average prices for the clothing and footwear group rose almost 10 percent in June. Prices related to transportation rose 17.4 percent due to higher fuel cost.

On the one hand the government is frequently enhancing prices of electricity, gas, petrol, and changing tax slabs, while on the other, the market forces are taking maximum advantage of the weak governance of the government regarding monitoring of demand and supply of essential commodities and fleecing the consumers as much as they desire.

Although the PTI government is providing

subsidies on consumer items through Utility Stores Corporation, this network is too small to provide large-scale relief to millions of consumers battered by the price hike in the country.

Furthermore, the cosmetic measures to monitor price hike are giving free hand to the market forces to fleece the consumers according to their will. For example, during the last quarter of fiscal year 2021 (April-June 2021), the retail prices of sugar shot up to over 100 rupees a kg while the merchants also created artificial shortage of the sweetener to mint money.

At that time the government's teams made surprise visits of shops, imposed fines on traders, and pulled up the sugar millers, resultantly, the retail price of sugar falling below 100 rupees for the time being. These days, the retail rates of this essential commodity are varying from 108 to 110 rupees per kg.

In the case of sugar, the government first launched a crackdown against sugar merchants and brought down its prices below 100 rupees/kg, but in the new budget for 2021-22, the government itself increased the sales tax slab on sugar, from fixed price of 60 rupees/kg to its ex-mill price, around 85-88 rupees per kg.

Ultimately, the price of the commodity automatically surged above 100 rupees kg at retail stage once again. This example indicates a lack of vision of the government to maintain stocks and prices of essential consumer items in the country.

Similarly, in recent months, the retail prices of ghee and cooking oil have surged by more than 50 to 60 rupees per liter/kg, but no one bothered to look into this issue, which was causing extra financial burden on consumers every week. The examples of sugar and cooking oil/ghee expose a lack of planning by the government to keep an eye on stocks, demand, and supply of the essential consumer items in the market.

A few weeks ago, Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin chaired a meeting of the Price Monitoring Committee and reviewed the prices of wheat, sugar, pulses, chicken and other essential food items. In that meeting the Secretary, Ministry of Food Security, Ghufraan Memon, briefed the committee about the import of wheat.

The Minister directed the Ministry of National Food Security to pace up efforts for the import of two million tons of wheat to ensure adequate stocks of the staple food in the country. Kamran Ali Afzal, Secretary of the Ministry of Industries and Production also told the meeting about ongoing import of 0.6 million tons of sugar for strengthening buffer stocks.

He said the tendering process had been initiated and adequate stocks of sugar would be available in the country until the next season. New crushing season begins from October 2021 and by that time the imported sugar will have increased the domestic stocks.

The import of sugar and wheat in the last two years also shows a lack of mechanism to ensure adequate production of sugarcane and wheat. Before the formation of the PTI government, Pakistan was exporting wheat and sugar, but the government started importing both items when hoarders and millers created artificial shortages in the country in the past two years.

Had the government maintained an adequate monitoring of production and supply of wheat and sugar, Pakistan could have avoided their import. How did the country that was exporting wheat and sugar started importing both commodities in large quantities in the last two years?

The PTI government must examine this case in a bid to avoid this situation in the future and to save precious foreign exchange being drained on imports along with protecting consumers from the artificial price hike of essential consumer items.

To sum up, the government must make effective its system that monitors production, demand, and supply of essential commodities with the aim to maintain inflation within the set target. Without making this mechanism effective, it would be impossible for the government to keep inflation low.

Meanwhile, the government should also review its tendency of generating maximum revenues by frequently revising upward prices of electricity, gas, and petroleum products. This policy seems to be the root cause of price hike in the country that is giving a boost to inflation every year.

By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan's Priciest LNG Purchases, Explained

In part, it was politicking over economic decision-making come back to bite Imran Khan.



By **Khalique Ahmad**

Even after seven years of doing the business of LNG imports and its utilization, the government ministries, divisions and entities involved remain unable to put in place a system of seamless business operation. No wonder then, the government continues to remain in the limelight for all the wrong reasons – high import prices, shortages, over-supplies and resultant rising circular debt.

All these shortcomings emanate from poor planning and in the absence of a centralized thought process. The basic premise of LNG import was to replace expensive furnace oil in power generation. All other uses were secondary for balancing and value addition.

It was, therefore, logical to expect managements of power plants, LNG importers, gas companies, and policymakers and planning teams in the ministries concerned would be sitting together in air-conditioned halls to forecast energy demand and supply, plan accordingly on the basis of different fuel sources and issue guidelines to those in the field and keep a watch on implementation.

This, however, could not go beyond the merger on paper of ministries of power and petroleum into a ministry of energy and a common minister for energy.

In practice, the two divisions are totally independent of one another – each under a different federal secretary. The subordinate entities or allied agencies of each work in their own silos. As a result, it has become very common that the country suffers from electricity and fuel shortages including furnace oil, diesel, LNG, coal, etc.

The power division and its entities have so far been unable to come up with firm estimates for various fuels to meet their electricity demand. The suppliers of the fuels – LNG and furnace oil – then keep waiting to place firm import orders given the price differential between local and imported gas. A key missing link remains the non-availability of any gas storage facility that could be used as a cushion to offset fluctuation in demand and supply.

In particular this year and as one indication of planning constraints was the inability by the authorities to foresee and then timely plan replacement of the LNG handling terminal for unavoidable maintenance. What followed was a crisis-like situation and the subject of public outcry as power shortages hit almost every consumer in harsh humid weather conditions.

In the middle of such a chaos, it becomes

normal that consumers do not get fair fuel prices and their purchasers and importers are seen by the suppliers as desperate buyers given short notices on which public sector entities have to enter the international market to address looming crisis situations.

Mainly because of these changing situations, the state-owned Pakistan LNG Limited last month cancelled a bid at the rate of USD 11.66 per unit for delivery in mid-July. However, it ended up purchasing from the same bidder for the same delivery dates a couple of days later for USD 12.77 per unit.

In other words, Pakistan had to pay USD 1.11 per unit more for about 140,000 cubic meter mainly because of kneejerk decision-making on the issue of dry-docking of an LNG terminal.

Even before this, the weighted average sale price for July at USD 12.92 per MMBTU made public by Ogra a few days earlier showed a 25 percent increase over average LNG price of USD 10.33 per MMBTU in June.

Unfortunately, the changing goalposts also led to new records. The bids for four spot

LNG deliveries in September accepted by the PLL ranged between USD 15.2 to USD 15.5 per MMBTU – the highest since the beginning of LNG imports in 2015.

Interestingly, about eight bids for September and October were cancelled including those at USD 13.79 to USD 13.99 per MMBTU from Qatar as some other bids touched USD 16.

The government was expecting better results through the revised round of bidding as prices in the Asian Spot LNG market had fallen below USD 12 per MMBTU. But these uncertainties were resulting in fuel management issues and leading to electricity shortfalls.



The electricity consumers and CNG operators become the ultimate losers – in the form of higher power tariff and CNG getting uncompetitive against petrol, respectively. The gas companies also suffer through an increase in circular debt that may get close to PKR 200 billion by end of the year from about PKR 130 billion in June this year.

The government had to publicly accept that it had purchased the most expensive LNG so far from the spot market but justified that it was 'a lesser evil' when compared with competing fuels – furnace oil and diesel.

"Pakistan LNG Ltd (PLL) board was forced to accept the four LNG 'spot' tenders at over USD 15 per MMBTU for September 2021; otherwise, the replacement fuel (i.e. furnace oil), which is even more expensive, would have resulted in

September power prices higher by at least 20 per cent," said Petroleum Division.

It also conceded that nobody could correctly predict the international commodity prices. At a bid price of USD 15.5 per MMBTU delivered ex-ship, the sale price at the end distribution network would work out well above USD 20 per MMBTU.

Ironically, a key factor to the LNG imports and many challenges now facing the sector emanated from the politicization of the issue by the ruling PTI when it compared cheap spot purchases in the past with longer-term contract imports from Qatar even though the two markets have no relationship and have different dynamics.

While the government was still recovering from this criticism, it emerged that Pakistan State Oil (PSO) had reported a new record import price to the Oil & Gas Regulatory Authority (Ogra). The Ogra sale price notified for August showed PSO's one cargo to have been purchased at USD 20.055 per unit (almost 27.9 percent of Brent), the highest ever not only in the country but perhaps the second priciest summer purchase in the world.

The notification suggests the PSO's average price of five other cargos from Qatar under a long-term contract at about USD 9.62 per unit at the rate of 13.37 percent of Brent. On the other hand, PLL's one cargo's price for a long-term contract stood at USD 8.6 per unit at the rate of 11.95 percent of Brent.

At these rates, LNG becomes unviable for power generation – the key consideration

for Pakistan – but the country was also short of diesel and furnace oil to run power plants as electricity shortages affected consumers, particularly households in humid conditions.

This meant the LNG supply chain had not fully recovered from the dry docking of one of the LNG terminals as the already fragile stockpile of fuel oils stood exhausted amid financial difficulties facing the suppliers and power generators.

These prices are charged to certain consumers, including power plants, during the current month.

As the public criticism followed, the PSO claimed it had scrapped the expensive cargo, and the Ogra had to withdraw its price notification, the first time in the country's LNG history.

The following week, PSO secured a better offer for LNG cargo from Qatar for the same delivery window in the last week of the current month at USD 15.93 per unit (22.13 percent of Brent) but this too, is the highest-ever LNG price in the country.

"The highest slope PSO has paid was in February 2016 which was 18.93 percent of Brent," PSO confirmed.

The company explained that the higher price was because of short notice at which it had been compelled to call tenders as it went for spot purchases as per annual plans provided by SNGPL and the latest cargo was not a part of the ADP for August. The SNGPL can book orders only on the firm demand of the power sector.

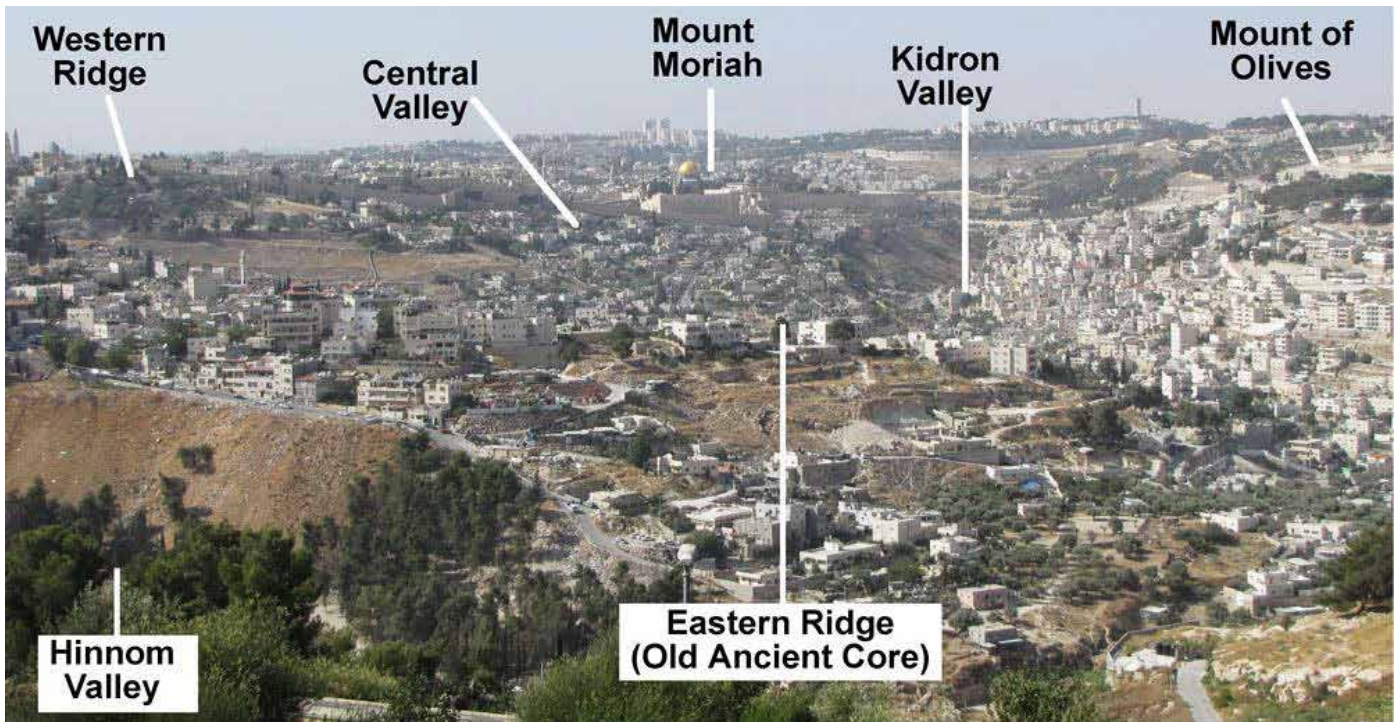
What all this proved clearly was the need for a coordinated demand and supply forecasting and planning models that should also cater for sudden variations and emergency situations.

SAPM Tabish Gauhar's demand for a centralized power-cum-petroleum planning cell merits consideration for accurate demand-supply forecasts based on data-driven economic modeling rather than politicization of economic and commercial decision-making.

Creation of LNG storages and reasonable stockpiling of other fuels, for unforeseen events could also be helpful in addressing major challenges.

CRUCIFIXION OF JESUS

And its impact on the World



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

Modern World political dynamics has its roots in the interaction of Greco-Roman (specifically Hellenization) and Judeo-Christian history and crucifixion of Jesus was an event which influenced the European Western Civilizational evolution during the past two millennia. Even the prophesied End times spiritual wars have Jesus' Second Coming as the eye of the tornado.

Born about 2022 years ago, Jesus (Hebrew Joshua) was a carpenter and a spiritual leader from Nazareth in Judea (present day southern Israel). Society of Judea, a Semi-autonomous region of Roman Empire was split between Hellenized Jews and Zealots (Jews seeking independence from Romans). Pharisees Jews were the religious class running the Jewish religious rituals and friendly with the ruling elite. Clash between Jesus and Pharisees was a confrontation between "a Diverse and Divergent Thinker" and several "closed and convergent thinkers".

Jesus openly criticized the "show off" spiritless attitude of the clergy and their ritualistic approach to religion. He labeled

them as white washed graves, clean from outside, dead and impure from inside.

At the Jewish Passover ceremony of Jerusalem (AD 30-33), he attacked them publically for showing off their religiosity, expensive tassels on their garments etc. He also criticized their love of public attention and celebrity status.

For this open revolt against Jewish clergy, Jesus was first tried before a Jewish Sanhedrin court in Judea. He was charged with blasphemy, convicted, and turned over to local Roman prefect Pontius Pilate for a subsequent Roman trial.

According to James, brother of Jesus, he was considered a Jewish nationalist linked to Zealot movement and their armed struggle for independence. Such a suspected link would have resulted in charges of sedition whose punishment is death by crucifixion, otherwise Jewish punishment for heresy was death by stoning.

According to Paul, Jesus' nonviolent sayings place him at odds with the Zealot movement. He held that Jesus was a Messi-

anic figure who mainly called for transformation from within. In any case, given the unstable state in Judea, Jesus' popularity was a threat to both pro-government Pharisees and the Roman.

Jesus was crucified till death on Friday. His body wrapped in shrouds and placed in a tomb. Sunday after Sabbath, Mary Magdalene, Jesus' female disciple, was the first to discover that body of Jesus was missing, i.e., Jesus has been resurrected from death. According to some in body and spirit, others say spirit only, and some liberals say in vision only. New Testament literature is for physical nature of resurrection.

According to Paul, Post resurrection of Jesus' appearance in chronological order was; a first appearance to Peter, then to the twelve disciples, then to 500 at one time, then to James (brother of Jesus), then to all the Apostles and last to Paul himself.

The Person of Jesus Christ (meaning anointed one) is both human and divine, a duality coexisting within one person. First few centuries witnessed several views about duality. But through various Church

councils, mainly in 4th and 5th centuries, they resolved most of the controversies of duality, resurrection and Salvation. Jewish law making the doctrine of Trinity Orthodox in nearly all branches of Christianity.

After resurrection, Jesus is portrayed as proclaiming 'eternal Salvation' and subsequently called the Apostles to the Great Commission, that is, to spread the Gospel to all nations of the world, and spread the good news saying: "the one who believes and is baptized will be saved, but the one who does not believe will be condemned". After the post resurrection appearances Jesus ascended to the Heavens.

The New Testament writings contend that resurrection was the beginning of "His exalted life" as Christ and Lord. Lord reflects that God has exalted Jesus to a Divine status. The worship "call upon the name of the Lord (Yahweh)" was also applied to Jesus, invoking his name in corporate worship.

Doctrine of Salvation through Jesus Christ's crucifixion rests upon the explanation by Paul; the sin of Adam and Eve is an original sin. The humans inherit a tainted nature with an inclination of sin through the fact of birth. Jesus' death was interpreted as a redemptive death 'for our sins' and firstborn Son of God's sacrifice was a necessity for salvation of humanity. His resurrection is a guarantee that all the Christian dead will be resurrected at Christ's Parousia (Second Coming). In Christian theology, justification is God's act of removing the guilt and penalty of Sin while at the same time making a sinner righteous through Christ's atoning sacrifice. Atonement is the pardoning of sin, and original sin in particular, through Jesus' ultimate sacrifice.

Jesus after resurrection appeared to Peter, and therefore, became rightful leader of the Church. Later on, teachings of Apostle Paul form a Key element of Christian tradition and theology. Fundamental to Pauline theology is the connection between Christ's resurrection and redemption. Paul insists that salvation is received by the Grace of God. Observance of law is needed to maintain the covenant, but the salvation is not earned by observing the law, but by the grace of God.

Early Christianity developed out of the eschatological (End times related) Ministry of Jesus.

Apostolic age begins after the Ascension of Jesus till 98 AD, year of death of last of the twelve Apostles. Initially they believed that Jesus' resurrection was start of the End times, but soon changed to expected Second Coming of Jesus. The Apostles spread the apostolic message first to Judea, then to Ionia, where Antioch later became a center for the Christian converts. These converts were considered a sect of Judaism since they followed Jewish law and remained under influence of Judaism. Later the message reached Anatolia and Thessalonica, along the Mediterranean rim to Eastern Europe and Africa. They believed the Second Coming will not happen until the word has been spread to all the Jews including the ones in diaspora.



Since the Roman Empire followed paganism and Jews after 85 AD persecuted the Christian faithful, so preaching of the new faith remained secretive. Jews declared that whoever considers Jesus as Messiah will not be allowed inside a synagogue. But persecutions made the new converts more adamant since their role model Messiah himself was persecuted much more severely.

Christian missionary activity spread and created centers of Christianity with Gentile adherents in the predominantly Greek-speaking Eastern half of the Roman Empire, and then throughout the Hellenistic world and even beyond the Roman Empire. First Gospel message was spread orally.

Paul was the one who introduced

Christianity to Gentiles of Ephesus, Corinth, Philippi and Thessalonica. Inclusion of Gentiles into faith created a problem for Jewish identity, because Paul allowed them to convert without condition of circumcision and exempted them of Jewish law. Pauline Christianity opened the way for a much large Christian church.

During first 300 years, Christians were able to live in relative peace under Roman rule, though sporadically persecuted when local communities forced enforcement people to persecute Christians since they were annoying gods by not worshipping them. In 64 AD, after the great fire of Rome, Nero, the Roman monarch blamed it on Christians, rounded them up and massacred them. But

in 311 AD, Roman official Edict ended Christian persecution.

Before becoming the king, Constantine adopted the emblem of Christians, and met successes on the battlefields till he overcame all his foes. After becoming the King, Constantine in 313 AD, by the Edict of Milan, legalized Christianity and it was recognized by the Roman state as a valid religion. He himself converted to Christianity and the whole Roman populace followed suit. By the end of 5th century Pauline Christianity prevailed over all others and all the houses of worship were taken over by their followers. Thus, within three centuries of Jesus' crucifixion, Christianity became a dominant spiritual force in the Mediterranean Rim.

Christian Prospective.

Zia Ud Din - An Era of Financial Journalism in Pakistan

By Kamal Siddiqi



In the recent history of Pakistan media, it is worth examining the career of Muhammad Ziauddin, one of Pakistan's most respected names in journalism.

While working for nearly sixty years at almost all the major newspapers of the country—The Muslim, The News, DAWN, The Express Tribune—Ziauddin sahib has managed the nearly impossible: to maintain a blemish-free record throughout despite skirmishes with the high and mighty, including the once all-powerful General Pervez Musharraf.

Muhammad Ziauddin was born in 1938 in Madras (now Chennai). The family moved to Dhaka, East Pakistan by 1952 after tumultuous events of 1948. In 1958, when Ziauddin was studying for his BSc in Pharmacy at Dhaka University and coaching the cricket team, he got a chance to travel to Karachi for a camp. And so, in 1960, when he was 21 years old, Muhammad Ziauddin moved to Karachi.

After doing first job as medical representative, in 1963, he enrolled in journalism at the University of Karachi. He took his first job in journalism as a cub reporter in PPI (then PPA) for a paltry sum of Rs75 a month in 1966. During his second year he had also worked as a campus reporter for daily Dawn.

He brought out an underground magazine called Voice of the Students, edited with Akhtar M Farooqi, who was also from the Journalism department.

He discontinued the publication when his English teacher Rehman sahib recognised the writing styles and warned to stop, otherwise...

Ziauddin then joined Pakistan's only private news wire at the time, Pakistan Press Agency, which was later renamed Pakistan Press International. The salary was a paltry 75 rupees. He worked with Jawaid Bokhari, retired as in-charge editor of Dawn's Economic and Business Review. Anwar Mansuri who retired as German news agency DPA's chief in Pakistan and the late Ashfaq Bokhari.

Around 1970s, Journalists were already protesting the Press and Publications Ordinance (PPO) promulgated by Ayub Khan in 1963 and in the fight between newspaper owners and journalists, a number of professionals lost their jobs.

The PPO was a draconian law, could confiscate your printing press, close down the newspaper, send you to jail and throw away the key and there would be no recourse to the law.

As matters were in transition, Ziauddin moved from PPA to the weekly Pakistan Economist in 1974 (later the Pakistan and Gulf Economist) where Ibnul Hasan was Editor.

It was at Pakistan Economist that Ziauddin interviewed the Khan of Kalat. "Physically a roly-poly figure, but intellectually a giant of a person, the Khan was exceptionally pleasant to converse with," recalls Ziauddin. He dilated on his vision for Balochistan within an independent Pakistan. The people of Balochistan would have, with all their rich mineral endowments and a vast coastline of white sand, taken the country far on the road to prosperity. Had the centrist, colonial minded-ruling elite of Pakistan not drastically tinkered with the Khan's vision of Balochistan in an independent Pakistan, perhaps the country would have averted most of the sociopolitical setbacks.



Ziauddin's interview with minister of production Rafi Raza was quite different. After the interview on the ministry. Rafi Raza's short but prophetic answer was: The two should come to some amicable understanding before the return of the 90,000 or so POWs, (a good number of them being Army personnel, both officers and rankers), being held by India at the time. The PM dismissed the Mengal government in Balochistan on some trumped-up charges of plotting secession. In protest, the NWFP coalition government led by CM Mufti Mahmood resigned, following which the country entered a highly unstable political phase that culminated in the ouster of the PPP government by the then COAS General Ziaul Haq, arrest and subsequent hanging of Bhutto and extended dictatorship that lasted eleven years.

In 1976, Ziauddin joined Morning News as an Assistant Editor on the invitation of the then Editor Sultan Ahmed, a difficult Editor,

not to spare anyone for the slightest of editorial lapses. SR Ghauri replaces Sultan Ahmed in Zia's era. Complaints were moved again Zia-Ud-Din on his pro-soviet and was about to be kicked out when, one day the NPT chairman came to see him. 'The (NPT- National Press Trust) Chairman had come all the way from Lahore to fire a pro-Soviet Communist (Zia-ud-Din) lurking in his Trust and went back after meeting a rozedar!', Ghauri told Zia-ud-Din.

In 1978, when General Ziaur Rehman lifted martial law from Bangladesh, Ziauddin wrote an editorial welcoming the move, but after the first salutary sentence, descended into an outpouring against dictatorship in general, which could easily be misinterpreted as being censorious of Pakistan's regime and it was. Radio Pakistan read it and was heard in a huge way.

Ghauri sahib and Ziauddin both went on a month's leave each. "Let us see what happens when we return!" he had said. That was the last meeting between the two men. Ghauri sahib resigned soon after and Ziauddin was offered a job at The Muslim, a newspaper being launched from Islamabad.



After almost twenty years in Karachi, Ziauddin moved to Islamabad where he worked under the legendary AT Chaudhry, Editor of The Muslim, in 1978. "He was a complete Editor," recalls Ziauddin. But the owner of the newspaper, Agha Murtaza Pooya, was a part-time politician with unconcealed ambitions. As the popularity of the newspaper grew rapidly under Chaudhry sahib's leadership, so did Agha's political ambitions and his interference in editorial decision-making.

The Muslim was launched at the height of Zia's dictatorship. Editorially, AT did what the seniors at the newspaper saw as a tight-rope walk. Coverage of government policies would be critical but not confrontational.

First Ziauddin's Bangladesh editorial, then his refusal to resign from the PFUJ and now this takeover. The information secretary was apoplectic. "A takeover and that too on the main thoroughfare of the capital!" The Muslim was located on main Aabpara Road. Rehman ordered the arrest of the entire editorial team. "By sheer luck I escaped arrest as I had gone to watch a movie with my wife," says Ziauddin. "When I got back to the office, I saw that the police had taken over the premises. I was not allowed to enter and all my colleagues were missing."

In 1983, Ziauddin won an APNS best investigative story award for his story exposing the conditions of IMF programmes. Pakistan

had signed just before the US offered a five-year \$3.02 billion and economic aid package in return for its help waging an American jihad against occupying Soviet troops in Afghanistan.

In 1982, Ziauddin joined Dawn's Islamabad bureau to report on the economy beat. Editor Ahmad Ali Khan appeared to be in complete control without any political interference.

Zia tried to buy off newspaper owners by allowing them duty-free newsprint imports 'strictly' in accordance with their circulations & requirements. And it was a great crime when newspaper owners claimed highly exaggerated circulation numbers so they could import newsprint far in excess of their requirements so they could sell the surplus in the market at prices equal to those that carried the import duty. Overnight, newspaper owners big and small turned into tycoons. In order to justify their circulation numbers, many of them increased their pages and editions. The owners of Dawn too benefited and indeed, two highly innovative weekly editions were launched: The weekly 'Economic & Business Review' or EBR and 'Books and Authors'.

Zia-ud-Din went to Lahore Bureau, but soon when Jang Group owner Mir Shakilur Rehman or MSR offered him the position of Editor of the Islamabad edition of The News, in 1991, following the departure of Dr Maleeha Lodhi as Ambassador to the US, Ziauddin made the change. He soon realized that MSR, unlike the owners of Dawn, was acting like a super editor. MSR's involvement continued to grow.

It was the end of the year 1993 when he received a call from Ahmad Ali Khan, asking him to rejoin Dawn as its Islamabad Bureau Chief. This he did and by 2001 the Islamabad edition of the paper was launched and Ziauddin became its first Resident Editor.

In 2006, Ziauddin was posted as Dawn's correspondent in the UK where he stayed till 2009.



Ziauddin received a call from Bilal Lakhani, the young publisher-to-be of The Express Tribune newspaper. But, he became Executive Editor and he agreed, taking up the position in 2009.

Ziauddin's exit from The Express Tribune came in 2014 after the Express Media group fought with the Jang Group after the Hamid Mir affair. He quietly wrote his resignation and sent it across. He posted a tweet as well on July 1, 2014.

Kamal Siddiqi is Director of the IBA's Centre for Excellence in Journalism. He was Editor of The Express Tribune.

A Piece of Heaven on Earth

Deosai Plains are at the same time a fairyland teeming with flowers of a million colors and a daunting landscape haunted by giants.



By Mishaal Ashraf

Thought absent long,
These forms of beauty have not been to me,
As is a landscape to a blind man's eye:
But oft, in lonely rooms, and mid the din
Of towns and cities, I have owed to them,
In hours of weariness, sensations sweet,
Felt in the blood, and felt along the heart,
And passing even into my purer mind
With tranquil restoration: - feelings too
Of unremembered pleasure; such, perhaps,
As may have had no trivial influence

William Wordsmith has oh so artistically described the beauty of nature that is often taken for granted. Located in the western massif of the Himalayas, east of Nanga Parbat, and in close proximity to the Central Karakoram Range lies the extraordinary Deosai Plains at an elevation of approximately 4,114 meters.

Deosai Plains have a rich biodiversity due to its location where two biogeographical provinces meet in the Himalayan and Karakoram-Pamir highlands. The site has been declared significant by international bodies because of its diverse alpine flora and the huge variety of species.

History shows that civilizations would move downwards, near rivers to settle down. With time, these small settlements turned to villages, towns, and eventually cities. In the age of industrialization and capitalism, the far-flung areas of peace and quiet were left behind, forgotten in their pristine glory. Deosai is one of those places.

For ages, this place was believed to be haunted by giants, hence came its name "Deosai", loosely translated as "The Land of Giants". With unpredictable weather conditions, snowfalls in summers, icy winds, harsh thunderstorms, and unforeseeable sunlight patterns, the place is less than ideal for human settlement.

Moreover, the abundance of various wildlife made travelling a challenging task. However, circumstances are changing now. The long-forgotten areas are becoming attractive tourist destinations.

Even though the plains are covered in snow for eight months, it still manages to provide home to a range of beautiful flowers of all hues and colors, without a single tree in the 3,000 square km region.

The locals enjoy feasting on trout fish from freshwater springs in Deosai. The real beauty of Deosai can be described as a curious fragrance of atmosphere that is home to playful marmots, red foxes, white tigers, brown bears, and golden eagles flying between clouds lying so low that one can touch them.

The best time to visit Deosai plains starts from mid-July to late September. A road from Skardu Bazaar takes you to Sadpara village. As a spring flowing through the road forces vehicles to slow down, local children approach to sell cherries and other local fruits.

The fruits in this area taste like they are sent down directly from heaven. The road becomes uneven as you move away from the village. With steep mountainside on one side and plunging depths on the other, the view can be overwhelming and breathtaking at the same time.

The northern areas of Pakistan are on a completely different level. The calm and quiet of these places is a means of catharsis. They are not only becoming popular tourist destinations for locals, but are also attracting international tourists.

Each new area comes with its own rich culture, local trends, regional sports, folk dances, music, festivities, and engrossing history. Tourists explain travelling to the north as a life changing experience. No words or photos can do justice to the areas. Located in Skardu, the world's second highest plateau is a must-visit for everyone!

Haggling Over the Cost of Saving the World

Are rich nations trying to wriggle out of their pledge to provide USD 100 billion every year to help poorer nations fight climate change?



TTI Report

Leading climate activists are representatives of developing countries are scrambling to goad the developed nations of the world into meeting their climate finance pledge ahead of COP26 to keep international climate negotiations on track.

Widely believed to be one of humanity's last chances to take action to prevent the worst impacts of climate change, COP26 – the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference – is scheduled to take place in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021 under the presidency of the United Kingdom.

The commitment by developed nations to provide USD 100 billion to help developing countries fight climate change was first announced in 2009, and was reiterated in the 2015 Paris Agreement.

A report from the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) last week confirmed stark warnings of human-induced global warming, but said we can halt and possibly reverse the rise in temperatures if we can cut global emissions in half by 2030 and reach net zero by the middle of this century.

Almost every nation on Earth signed up to the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement that aims to keep the rise in global temperatures well below 2C this century and to pursue efforts to keep it under 1.5C.

The IPCC report says that under all the emissions scenarios considered by the scientists, both targets will be broken this century unless huge cuts in carbon take place.

Responding to the report, Scotland's Net Zero Secretary Michael Matheson highlighted the "very real threat and heightened risk" the climate emergency poses to the world.

"We will carefully consider the latest advice contained in the report and encourage others to do so too", said Matheson – and he warned, "We will not get many more warnings before time runs out".

He said the report also made clear that with immediate, concerted international action to cut emissions, the global temperature rise could still be limited to 1.5°C in the longer term

But action requires funding, and developed countries – by definition the worst polluters of the environment – are

dragging feet over meeting a funding pledge they made over a decade ago.

The G7 leaders, who met in Cornwall in Britain in June, issued a communique touching on their plans to meet the goal but stopped short of explaining how, punting the decision to the next G20 meeting due to take place in Italy in September.

A report last year by the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) estimated that in 2018 financial flows reached USD 80 billion. This figure has been contested by developing countries, who say loans should not be counted.

An analysis of these numbers by British charity Oxfam reveals that no more than USD 20 billion worth of funding was provided as grants and is eligible to be counted towards the USD 100-billion climate finance goal.

Frustratingly for climate activists, most discussions on finance up until now have been held outside the UNFCCC meeting agenda, including two workshops looking at climate finance from 2025 onwards, on which negotiations will begin at COP26.

“[Developed] countries have simply decided to ignore this collective finance commitment”, says Bangladeshi author Prof. Saleemul Huq. “[E]ach country is calculating for itself what it is supposed to provide and what they will count towards their respective share”.

Alok Sharma, the British official who will preside over the COP26

climate talks, has called the USD 100 billion a ‘totemic’ figure that developed countries must provide to retain any semblance of credibility in the UN process.

It should not be forgotten that the amount of USD 100 billion “is not at all commensurate with the scale of climate finance required to help developing nations adopt clean energy and adapt to worsening extreme weather and rising seas”, said an op-ed piece by Huq, the director of the International Centre for Climate Change and Development (ICCCAD) at the Independent University, Bangladesh (IUB).

“The sums needed are in the trillions rather than the hundreds of billions. Meeting that outstanding ‘totemic’ pledge is, however, a test of whether wealthy large-emitting nations will negotiate with their counterparts in the Global South on tackling the climate crisis in good or bad faith”.

COP26 will incorporate the 26th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the 16th meeting of the parties to the Kyoto Protocol (CMP16), and the third meeting of the parties to the Paris Agreement (CMA3).

Originally due to be held in November 2020 but postponed for twelve months in light of the COVID-19 pandemic in Scotland, COP26 is the first time that Parties are expected to commit to enhanced ambition since COP21.



The Rise of Machines

Artificial intelligence, machine learning, and robotics are taking over the world before our eyes.

By Mahrukh Khalid

“Siri, could you please call...” “Google, tell me the best restaurants near me” or “Alexa, play music” are things we are already so used to hearing and saying that we don’t even realize that we are speaking to an inanimate object.

Do we realise we are plunging at a breakneck speed into a world where we'll see more robots and machines than humans? Do we realise the implications of this profound change?

From automatic vacuum cleaners to medical treatments, Artificial intelligence (AI) is taking over the world. Ever since the first batch of COVID vaccines were dispatched, people have been curious about how a vaccine was made this quickly. It never crossed our minds that it was possible because of AI and machine learning.

'Machine learning models' were used by scientist to narrow down relevant information regarding the virus out of thousands of subcomponents data. This made research faster and easier for scientists to compile information and create a vaccine.

Mental health is no exception as applications like Youper and Replika are available for people to track their stress, anxiety, and depression, providing treatments depending on the patient's record. These applications also integrate chatbots, allowing you to have small conversations to relieve your stress, anxiety, or depression.

AI has not only saved time in our busy schedules but it has also made life easier for those with less abilities than the rest of us. Seeing AI is an application that one can download to a smartphone. It describes the surroundings for the visually impaired, allowing them to be able to enjoy the scenery just like everyone else. It also protects them from dangers of bumping into something or someone.

Other than helping people see, these new technologies give arms and legs to people to work and walk. 'Prosthetics and AI' for amputees are being combined to make the experience as close to reality as possible. Soon to be accomplished mind detecting sensors in prosthetics would help move the limbs more quickly and easily.

AI also allows for people who speak different languages to communicate. AI translators translate written or spoken words in one language and converts it into another language. Learning a new language has become much easier because of this and travelling to a foreign country whose language you don't speak is no issue at all anymore.

AI for the economy

A study by PricewaterhouseCoopers (PwC) forecasted that the use of AI will change the global GDP by increasing it by up to 14 percent (the equivalent of USD 15.7 trillion) by 2030.





Moving forward, many companies will be employing AI to increase their productivity and efficiency. It can also help in conducting research on market trends and peoples' preferences so more relevant products can be created.

While work is being done by machines, humans can focus on finding new strategies and techniques to market their product. It will also reduce stress and pressure over labour and help them relax more.

AI can also provide assistance in regards to investment. AI helps the investors by informing them of automation, ease of use, scalability, decision-making assistance and risk analysis for a good experience for banking requirements.

This will increase the success rate of investing in projects. Similar technology will be used in the near future in regards to trade negotiations by providing data analysing the economic trajectories of each negotiating partner. A convincing proposal can thus be created accordingly.

The use of AI by online companies like eBay is already coming into play making shopping much easier. This allows small businesses to integrate with the global economy and share the fruits.

However, we cannot forget that the employment of these new technologies is sure to disrupt the economy. People will be left jobless and without a steady income as they are replaced with automatons.

People not skilful with modern technology or lacking the ability to adapt to change would lose their jobs. If people don't have an income, they will not be able to afford the products, thus surplus production will go to waste.

Wealth will be concentrated among countries who can afford to manufacture AI and thus the gap between the first world countries and third world countries will widen. This will lead to income inequality and disparity in resource distribution.

Machines on the battlefield

There have been rumours ever since the invention of mobile phone and AI like Alexa and Siri that the government and the military are observing us and listening to our conversations. But is that really true?

While it's difficult to say for sure, similar techniques are being used with the help of CCTV cameras in public places. This is to make sure that no suspicious activity is

taking place and also to identify criminals or terrorists in the scenario that such a thing is in fact taking place.

Soon AI will be used by the military to observe enemy territories through drones. As well as attacking them with the help of robotic swarms or the delivery of disease through nanobots to disrupt the life of the enemy.

Going forward, countries will have to keep a lookout for even the most unexpected attacks from anonymous countries.

There are also chances of 'killer robots' being used to kill people instead of human police or military. The purpose behind this is to remove any chances of remorse of hesitation by humans while killing the other side.

What next?

It is safe to say that the world inevitably will eventually be taken over by machines and life will continue to become faster and easier. Technology will keep progressing.

But if we do not proceed with adequate caution, the economy and society as we know them today will be destroyed, causing untold human suffering and misery.

Justice for Noor Mukadam - and the Rest of Them

When will the state move on from lip service and take action to ensure protection of women and girls?



On a horrific night of July, 27 year old Noor Mukadam daughter of Shaukat Mukadam, who has served as Pakistan's ambassador to South Korea and Kazakhstan, was tortured and brutally murdered by Zahir Jaffer who was the son of an affluent business family.

We all know this incident by heart because of how much attention it received. Media channels and protests blew up at this atrocity that had hit a posh city like Islamabad. The situation left multitudes terrified. The nightmares of becoming the next Noor took away the sleep of many women across Pakistan.

However, while we realize the enormity of this case, did we stop to listen to the thousands of voices who went through the same brutality as Noor screaming for justice? Did they not deserve the same attention as the daughter of an ambassador?

In May 2021, a 25 year old was arrested for raping 20 women in Islamabad, do we know the name of this rapist or even this incident? What about the 6 year old that was raped, murdered, and thrown

in a dumpster in Korangi town? Or the eighth grader daughter of a labourer who was abducted and gang raped on 28th June 2021 from her own home? Or the 53 other cases registered of gang rape in the first four months of 2021 in Punjab province?

Many such cases take place in Pakistan every day, but why is it that they are not deserving of even a single placard for their justice?

We've all heard the maxim about blind justice but is that really the case? What it means is that when a case comes before a court of law, the social station of family connections of the criminal or the victim should not matter.

Justice must be served whether the victim is the child of a blacksmith or a cabinet minister. The perpetrator must be brought to book and the victim must be given justice. However, unfortunately, such is not the case in Pakistan.

We have been hearing promises to toughen anti-rape and honour killing laws since forever. However, we are yet to see them being imposed. An Anti-Rape Ordinance was signed by

President of Pakistan, Arif Alvi in December 2020. The Ordinance required the courts to decide each rape case within four month.

It also required the identity of the victim to be kept confidential and mandated the establishment of a national sex offenders' register. The law laid down that any officer is found neglectful while investigating a rape case will be penalized with a three-year prison sentence.

The ordinance also expanded the definition of rape by including all genders. It was added that the question of consent would not be taken into consideration in the scenario that the girl is below 16 years old and having sex with a girl less than 16 years would be considered as 'statutory rape.'

Section 375-A was also introduced in regards to the offence of gang-rape in the primary criminal law of the country.

From January 2021, it was discussed that the Ordinance would include the punishment of chemical castration of convicted rapists. But despite all these

claims, the number of cases are not being controlled. The women and children of Pakistan are not safe, and something must be done about it immediately.

Is execution the solution?

Ever since Noor's case, female MNAs have raised their voices in favor of public execution. Women members of National Assembly from PML-N (Pakistan Muslim League Nawaz), PTI (Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf) and PPP (Pakistan People's Party) all united to make this appeal.

"We 69 women MNAs demand quick judgement in rape cases and public hanging of rapists," said Syeda Nosheen Iftikhar of Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N).

"If Pakistan has to be run, then rapists and killers must be hanged in public, said Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) lawmaker Asma Qadeer. "We will not let the country be run in the way it is being run."

However, while many speak in favour of hanging the rapists, many also believe that killing the rapist may not solve the problem at hand.

"Responding to violence with violence has

never worked," claims Dr Ayesha Mian, a psychiatrist at Karachi's Aga Khan University Hospital. She says public execution and chemical castration are short term solutions that won't be beneficial in the long-run.

It has also been pointed out that public execution is a violation of Article 14 of the Constitution which states, "No person shall be subjected to torture for the purpose of extracting evidence."

"The punishment of public hanging also violates Pakistan's international human rights commitments", says Saroop Ijaz, Lawyer and Senior Counsel at Asia Division.

Many who speak in favour of public execution usually give the example of Zia ul Haq's regime which allowed the hanging of rapists and thus reduced the number of rape cases.

However, after further investigation it was revealed that during his regime it was also imposed that the victim must provide four eye witnesses to prove they were raped and failure to do so would accuse the victim of adultery and thus would be punished instead. This led to the decrease in the cases reported and didn't actually control rape.

In recent times, the rapist and murderer of 7 year old Zainab Ansari, Imran Ali was

hanged for his heinous act. However, this had little effect on the thousands of similar reported cases after the public execution.

The way forward

Why must we wait for rape or murder to take place to take action? Sexual or physical abuse, gender-based violence and discrimination, patriarchy are the root of the problem.

The moment women and children are given the respect and protection they deserve is the moment when rape and murder will stop taking place. Security of life is the right of every individual and it is the responsibility of government to keep their residents safe.

While strict laws must be imposed regarding rape, murder, and honour killing, laws regarding minor offences against women must also be introduced. Barriers to the reporting of such incidents must be removed and protection must be provided to the victim by the government until the criminal is caught.

Meanwhile, let us all as individuals try our best to control such heinous acts by keeping an eye out for each other and such incidents around us and report them immediately.

By Mahrukh Khalid



Mental Health and Competitive Sports

We must expand our value system to allow that sometimes, it is okay to sit out, okay to fail.



By Haider Rifaat

It is never easy for athletes to live up to the picture-perfect standards of the world. Self-care is bound to suffer long-term when there is pressure to satisfy massive crowds with power-packed, impeccable performances. Sports is a profession that demands your very best, all the time, every time.

The very nature of competitive sports dictates that you either win or lose a game. However, no one sees the bigger picture. Efforts go unnoticed and runner-ups are immediately put to shame.

Recently, American gymnast Simone Biles made the brave decision to withdraw from Olympic finals this year in an effort to look after her personal health.

In a statement to the press, Biles said, “I say put mental health first because if you don’t, then you are not going to enjoy your sport, and you are not going to succeed as much as you want to.

“So, it is okay sometimes to even sit out the big competitions to focus on yourself because it shows how strong of a competitor and person that you really are.”

Simone began her stint as an athlete at the age of 14 years. Apart from numerous physical injuries, she suffered sexual abuse by US Olympic team doctor Larry Nassar, the aftermath of which could be Posttraumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD). Simone also suffers from Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD).

With over 30 World/Olympic medals under the belt, Simone Biles is the most sought after female athlete in the United States. As a woman of color, she is breaking more than just a glass ceiling for women. With her decision to withdraw, Biles has proven that it is okay to take a pause, overcome mental roadblocks and come out stronger than ever.

However, Biles is not the only athlete to take a stand for her mental health. Naomi Osaka and Michael Phelps have been equally passionate about bringing mental health to the forefront using their platform.

Phelps went on to work on an HBO Documentary released last year titled “The Weight of Gold” in which he, alongside Apolo Ohno, Shaun White, Lolo Jones, Gracie Gold and others detailed their personal struggles with mental health issues.

Considering mental illness is often considered a societal taboo, these are important conversations that encourage openness. Sufferers of mental illness are immediately labeled, judged, and abandoned.

In the star-studded world of sports, it is influential figures like Simone Biles and Michael Phelps who are truly awe-inspiring. Their openness is sure to allow millions of others to take a stand for

themselves in the face of mental health challenges.

The competitive nature of our civilizations means that at a tender age, children are expected to outperform their peers, get the best grades in schools, and be equally good in extracurricular activities.

These unrealistic expectations tend to dehumanize them and affect other areas of their lives as they grow older. Mental challenges could wind up overpowering them once they assume professional duties as adults.

It is upon states and societies as well as families, schools, and colleges to reconsider their value systems and teaching strategies. We must allow that sometimes, it is okay to fail. Experiences teach you to do better.

Most important, if individuals are not allowed to experience personal growth with certain lived experiences, their mental wellbeing would inevitably suffer.

Prioritizing mental wellness over everything else is paramount. The onus is on us to destigmatize mental illness, but more importantly, redefine “perfection” in a world that demands so much from us.

We tend to give our work life disproportionate importance at the cost of our mental comfort. It is about time that we change this common practice.

Simon Biles’ decision to withdraw should not be seen as failure. It should be seen as bravery and resilience. Her decision should not disappoint people. It should instead uplift them.

It is also narrow-minded to limit what causes athletes mental discomfort. For many of them, circumstances vary. For some female players, revealing attire is problematic.

Women athletes at large are overly sexualized for their “by the book” uniforms. They are penalised if they assert their right to

wear what they want. Take, for instance, Norway’s women’s beach ball team’s decision to wear shorts instead of bikini bottoms at the European Beach Handball championship: The team was fined EUR 1,500.

Major tournaments expect female athletes to wear attire that sexualizes them instead of giving them the option to wear what they feel comfortable in. This likely affects their performance and mental toughness.

There is also a dire need for sportspeople to have access to counsellors in all major and state-level championships. Organizers must ensure the mental well-being of athletes is safeguarded before any tournament commences.

Hopefully, conversations regarding athletes and their state of mental health would materialize into something more productive going forward.



KPL Roars into Action

Kashmir Premier League will promote cricket in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir while developing and showcasing local talent.



By Ali Abdullah

Kashmir Premier League (KPL) is a league for the youngsters of Kashmir. The inaugural edition has started from August 6 and the final will be played on 16 August.

It was founded in 2020 and currently its inaugural season is being played. Each team is led by a Pakistani cricket superstar. There are four overseas players in the league as well.

Pakistan Cricket Board's Kashmir Premier League is a T20 league consisting of six teams, five of them representing the cities in the Azad Jammu and Kashmir and one representing overseas Kashmiris. All six teams have one overseas slot.

The six teams are Bagh Stallions, Mirpur Royals, Muzaffarabad Tigers, Overseas Warriors, Kotli Lions, and Rawalakot Hawks. The overseas players are Phil Mustard, Owais Shah, Tillakaratne Dilshan and Herschelle Gibbs.

Big names like Shoaib Akhtar, Waseem Akram, Shahid Afridi, and Shoaib Malik are part of the league as well. The Rawalpindi Express and the Sultan of Swing are the Peace Ambassadors. Boom Boom Afridi is the Brand Ambassador of the league as well as the captain of Rawalakot Hawks.

Kashmir Premier League is not focusing on the star players or foreign players. No doubt, they are superstars of the world but the purpose of this league is to showcase the talent of Kashmir and to bring Kashmiri players up on the board and in the eyes of selectors.

The Board of Control for Cricket in India (BCCI) wrote to International Cricket Council (ICC) that Kashmir Premier League should

not be recognized by the ICC as this is an "illegal territory occupied" by the Pakistan Army.

The BCCI has also threatened the overseas players by telling them that they won't be allowed to enter India for any cricket related work and will be banned from India if they participate the KPL. They threatened cricket boards all around the world as well.

The Indian Board also threatened players individually. Herschelle Gibbs even tweeted about the situation how BCCI is mixing politics and cricket and it's a very childish thing to do.

Former England spinner Monty Panesar was initially part of the league but he pulled out due to the childish behavior of the BCCI. A senior member of International Cricket Council (ICC) spoke to a news channel in which he said that there's nothing ICC can do about it as it's not an international event.

India failed to do anything about the league other than promoting it more around the world even more and just making a fool of themselves.

The league started, Rawalakot Hawks played their first match against Mirpur Royals. The Hawks elected to bat first. The openers made a partnership of 100+ runs. And then the little cameo of Shahid Afridi brought excitement to the match.

Rawalakot Hawks set a total of 194. Mirpur Royals were confident to win the inaugural game of KPL but failed to do so. They scored 151 in 20 overs. Bismillah Khan scored 59 of 34 deliveries and was named man of the match.

Glorious Finale Marks End of Tokyo 2020 Olympics

Pakistan's fruitless quest for medals prompts soul searching at home.

After seventeen days of gruelling action involving 11,000 athletes from 206 countries from around the world competing for 309 medals across 33 sports, Tokyo 2020 Olympics culminated in a colourful closing ceremony on Sunday, 8th August 2021.

Celebrating Japanese culture, the event was built around the theme "Worlds We Share", underlining the idea that each of us inhabits their own world.

The Covid-19 global pandemic, which delayed the Games for a year, exacted its cruel toll on the ceremony, reducing its spirited performances in front of thousands of empty seats and few athletes in attendance.

Some 436 people related to the Olympics tested positive for the virus since early July. Outside the Olympic bubble, daily cases in Tokyo have more than tripled since the 23rd July opening of the Games.

The United States was able to impose its supremacy over the world of sports one more time, edging China for most golds as well as for most overall medals. China made a point by coming in second ahead of hosts Japan.

Pakistan's quest for medals remained fruitless as expected – although two of our athletes drew notice both at home and internationally, while India recorded its most successful Olympics with seven medals – one gold, two silver, and four bronze.

The turn of event has given rise to much soul searching in the country. Commentators pooh-poohed Pakistan Olympic Association to sending only ten athletes to the Games and for inadequate training and exposure for those sent. On top of everything else, the grapevine has it that the Pakistan troupe included more officials than athletes.

Also under fire is Pakistan Hockey Federation for the fact that Pakistan failed to qualify for this iterations of Olympics – a badge of ignominy for the side that has won 20 official titles.

Field hockey is the national sport of Pakistan, and yet there is not a single international level hockey stadium in the country – a fact that directed the popular wrath on successive governments.

Talha Talib, the weightlifter who put the legendary Pakistani grit on display for the world to see trained at his own expense as there was no support from the government.

Then there was the javelin thrower Arshad Nadeem who qualified for the final round but failed to make the podium. Arshad Nadeem is also from a small town in Pakistan called Mian Channu.

Before settling on Javelin throw, Arshad also pursued shot-put and discus throw. It was his father Muhammad Ashraf who persuaded him to take up the sport of javelin throw.



Gold medals in Javelin throw in successive Punjab Youth Festivals and an inter-board meet propelled him on to the national stage, bringing offers from all the leading domestic athletics teams, including Army, Air Force and WAPDA.

He secured first position in his group in semi-finals but due to lack of training and facilities he could not win a medal. Whereas another athlete from India who won the gold medal was training in Europe for the two months.

It was Pakistan's eighteenth appearance at the Summer Olympics. Pakistan became the country with the largest population to not win a single medal at 2020 Tokyo Olympics.

Pakistan has not won a medal since 1992 Summer Olympics.

This Olympics was Pakistan's best performance since 1992, with both Talha Talib and Arshad Nadeem reaching the finals of their events and barely missing out on a medal. Gulfam Joseph also barely missed out on reaching the final of his event.

It's time to take a look upon the management, Sports Board of Pakistan and Olympic Association of Pakistan as it's not the way we should treat our athletes. There is a lot of talent in Pakistan. The youngsters need to be polished and it's not anyone's responsibility except Minister of sports and the whole sports board.

The Paralympics begin on 24th August in Tokyo, whereas Paris is preparing to host the 2024 summer games.

By Ali Abdullah

The Double Disruption Called Chinto Ki Mummy

Fasih Bari Khan's CKM is a textbook study in how liberating a digital video project can be compared with the traditional media.

By Hasan Kazmi

Powered by OTT platform like Netflix et al and online video sites like YouTube etc., digital video has for some time been established as a disruptive medium, snatching viewers away from both cinema and broadcast television.

But what happens when you couple this technological disruption with creative disruption? Ace penman Fasih Bari Khan has the answer: Chinto Ki Mummy (CKM) – an original web series that premiered over his YouTube channel Kabaarr Khaana.

But why would an established movie and drama writer turn to YouTube? The answer, again, is Chinto Ki Mummy: The dark humour and blunt social commentary of the series was suited to neither cinema nor television.

None of this, however, begins to describe the phenomenon that is CKM. The best course of action for anybody wishing to wrap their head around this ground-breaking digital flick directed

by Imran Qazi and produced by Faiza Hassan would be to go watch it over YouTube the other week.

Talking about why he chose to put his content on YouTube channel whereas he is an established television drama writer, Khan replied, “Actually I was writing this script for a film as I knew the topic of the story would not fit into our television drama.

“But unfortunately, I could not make it even into a film as the producers tried to convert it into an elite concept while I wanted it to be a very casual or common man story. The essence would be gone if I had done that on their lines.”

Khan added that in the meantime he observed very closely the content available on the web – and he thought of using this idea (which was just a track of the story of his film) for a web series.

“So, Faiza Hasan and I decided to start

a YouTube channel by the name of Kabaarr Khaana and CKM is our first project”, says Khan, who did story, screenplay, and dialogue for the series.

Chinto Ki Mummy is a story of an upper middle class family of Lahore where the desperate housewife is trying to rebuild a healthy and romantic relationship with her husband.

And if you were intrigued by Moin Akhtar’s Rosie or Ali Saleem’s Begum Nawazish Ali, you will have plenty to be intrigued by in CKM: The female lead is played by a male actor Waqar Hussain.

Fasih Bari Khan says he had Waqar Hussain in his mind when he was writing this character. He added that in dark comedy, one should experiment and show something different and unusual to the audience.

Another consideration was that “our mainstream female actresses would not be able to do justice to the role as



Waqar did”, says the writer. “They would have some reservation in doing some scenes. Interestingly, women are appreciating it more than male viewers”.

Asked if he thinks the digital space would be the new future of our entertainment industry, the writer was of the view that it can be but we would have to bring some novel ideas and work on strong content. “We have to give something new to the viewers which they generally can’t watch on television and even in films.”

To the question if we make a good web drama or film with minimal budget and without big stars, Khan said, “It is a fact that established stars wherever they appear bring views. It is also a fact that not everybody who is producing digital content has that big budget for stars and technical expertise.

“So here we have to work on strong content with new talent and minimal technical requirements. We have to design our stories in a way that doesn’t need much technical work on shoot or post shoot. The content should be strong enough that it doesn’t need much technical beatification to hide the flaws.”

Talking about his project Fasih Bari Khan disclosed that they made it on a very nominal budget, “We could not afford highly paid artists and heavy technical equipment so we put all our efforts on content and picked new and enthusiastic talent. We shot on real locations with natural light and the lights fixed at house.”

Khan finds it weird that thinking about different ideas for digital means going very philosophical to many writers, which ends up becoming inaccessible to the larger audience most of the time. Others work more on the beatification and technical stunts to make it different rather than building strong and relatable characters.

“So it should be the new and relatable ideas, strong content and talented actors to make a good product in a minimal budget for the web”, says Khan. “Yes in that way it can be a future where much new and emerging talent can also try their luck as a producer, writer, director, producer and actor”.



Bilal Ashraf 'Never Wanted to Become an Actor'

The only original film star in a generation says he joined acting to fulfil the dream of his late sister.



By **Kaukab Jahan**

Bilal Ashraf is among few actors of Pakistan presently, who can be called real film stars. Unlike the current crops of artistes who first won fame from television and then came into films, Ashraf is the only one who enjoys the status of a film actor and that too in lead roles.

Besides acting, he also carries a distinct style whether it is a humble attitude that attracts others towards him or his physique about which he is always very concerned. Recently he won the Hum Style award for 'Most Stylish Actor film – Male'.

Before coming into acting, Bilal Ashraf worked as visual effects director for ten years. He studied visual effects direction at Franklin & Marshall College in Pennsylvania, United States.

His acting career started with a brief appearance in the 2014 thriller O21. He then starred as lead in the commercially successful romantic drama Janaan (2016), the war eulogy Yalghaar (2017), and the blockbuster musical romance Superstar (2019).

The Truth International (TTI) got up close and personal with this unique artiste to know more about him as a person and actor and his passion for acting and filmmaking.

TTI: Did you have any idea of getting this award?

BA: No. I didn't have any idea. In fact I was a bit anxious if I didn't get the award. I am truly thankful and humbled for all those who voted for me and made it possible.

TTI: How do you define style?

BA: I think it is one's personal statement. It is whatever you are comfortable with or in and carry it off. Some people like dressing up a lot while some want to look very casual and natural.

TTI: What would you say about the controversy that was created after the Hum Style Awards?

BA: I think social media created a lot of controversy around the event. I believe that everyone has a right to comment on anything but it should always be thoughtful enough. Some people are very strong mentally while others we don't know are going through a lot of problems. They get adverse effects from these comments which can lead to mental disorders. So please next time criticize constructively like on their work and professional being, and do positive comments as well – not always negative.

TTI: The way some female actors and models dressed was criticized very negatively. What would you say?

BA: In style awards, everyone carries their own style statements. The same people who are criticizing our celebrities' clothing, when they watch Hollywood or Bollywood stars as the same, in a movie or show, they appreciate them. We should not take anything personally and if someone is wearing something by their will, then please have some courage to accept it.

TTI: You are among the few actors who won fame only in films but entered a bit late. Why?

BA: I never wanted to become an actor. Actually, filmmaking was a dream of my late sister Sadia but at that time, the film industry was very limited in Pakistan. Unfortunately she lost her life battling cancer. So I am here to fulfil the dream of my sister. Whenever I am acting, I feel her around me.

TTI: Right now, where do you find yourself standing in the industry?

BA: I think we already have big names as heroes in our industry. I feel honoured if I have been successful to make some name

and fame among them. From now on, I will constantly remain standing here to accomplish the dream of my sister.

TTI: The cinema industry is suffering all over the world because of Covid. So in this case, what alternatives do you find?

BA: I am among few actors in Pakistan who have just worked in films so I think it's time to move towards television dramas. I believe that television is a great platform to improve my skills and to learn more about the trade from the masters. So, yes, television is next.

TTI: How was the journey from Janaan to Superstar?

BA: I have actually enjoyed this journey so far. As far as my journey is concerned, I did Janaan as a fun experience. I had never thought it would be a hit. The second one, Rangreza, was a flop though but it actually was an eye opener, as after Rangreza, I revisited my approach to acting.

I went to the UK and inducted myself in some acting courses there. I became more careful in choosing scripts. Finally I was lucky to have found the ideal producer Momina Duraid, best director Muhammad Ehteshamuddin, and wonderful co-star Mahira Khan for Superstar.

Moreover, Momina Bhabi and Ehtesham Bhai also asked me to have some acting courses in NAPA, where I really learned a lot.

TTI: You have been lucky to work with almost all female film actors in Pakistan. Who do you wish to work with in Hollywood or Bollywood?

BA: I really admire Sophia Loren, though she is much senior and not working in films anymore. I also have a dream to work with Meryl Streep.

TTI: What are your future plans?

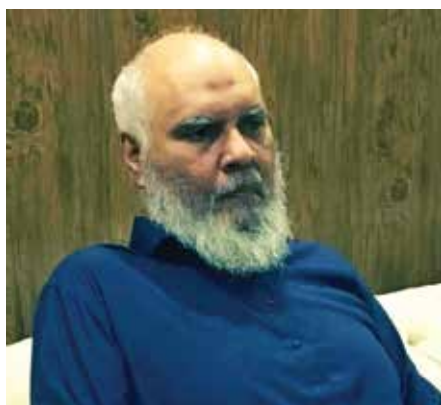
BA: I think films, television and web series are all in the pipeline. Moreover, I have launched a production house 'Beehive Transmedia' with my mentor Muhammad Ehteshamuddin, for which I am really thankful to him. We work on commercials and feature films, concepts and scripts. It is a one-stop creative shop.



CITY NOTES:

Mujahid-i-Sani is not Mujahid-i-Awwal

By M.A. Niazi



Perhaps the new prime minister of AJK will be the man under whom the Kashmir issue will be solved, for he seems of an unusual prescience.

You see, he chose the name Niazi, because when he was a member of Poonch District Council back in the day, his name was the same as Sardar Abdul Qayyum, the leader of the party he was then in. Now why he chose Niazi to distinguish himself I don't know, but he did.

Did he know that he would one day join a party led by a Niazi? Whatever the reason, he made the choice, and it was under that name that he served in Sardar Qayyum's son Atique's Cabinet. Sardar Qayyum was Dhund Abbasi, to be distinguished from the Kalhoro Abbasis of Sindh and Bahawalpur. Dhund Abbasis are an extensive biradari, spreading over part of KP into Potohar sand reaching Bagh district in AJK. Mehtab Abbasi was both Governor and CM in KP, while Shahid Khaqan was PM of Pakistan. Sardar Qayyum was both President and PM of AJK.

This Sardar Qayyum is neither Dhund nor Niazi, but a Dulli Mughal. Speaking at an election rally, Imran, who doesn't normally stress his tribe, was moved to wonder what a Niazi was doing so far afield. The main place we come from, which might even be referred to as the Niazi homeland, is Mianwali district. Apart from that, they were in East Punjab's Hoshiarpur district, but after that, I've come to hear of Niazi's from

Faisalabad, Sahiwal, and Khanewal, and I'm sure they're settled in other colony districts. You see, Mianwali is an arid and thus relatively infertile land, while that was the whole point of colony districts: they were made fertile by water.

Because there were large tracts of fertile land in colony districts, East Punjabi refugees also got allotted those lands. And that included all those East Punjabi Niazis.

Anyhow, the late Sardar Abdul Qayyum is known as Mujahid-i-Awwal, because he was the one, back in 1947, who raised the standard of revolt against the Dogras. If this one plays a role in freeing Kashmir, will he be known as Mujahid-i-Sani?

Imran also was probably also relieved that Arshaf Nadem did so badly at the Olympics. Imagine the embarrassment of riches that we would have had for future PMs in Shaheen Shah Afridi, a personable fast bowler, and an Olympic gold medalist. What seems to have proved that Nadeem Arshad is a traitor and a corrupt element (which is the same thing) is that he failed to get a medal in an event won by an Indian, India's only gold medal so far these Olympics.

Of course, there have also been developments in the cricket world, on which Imran

is concentrating as hard as on developments in Afghanistan. Australia has lost the T20 series to Bangladesh, having lost to the West Indies over there. So Pakistan should get them over while they think that losing on tour is OK. But then, Ireland and Afghanistan are already inviting them to tour, just to see how far the Aussies can sink.

I wonder if Dr Firdous Ashiq Awan has resigned as SACM, as CM's spokesperson. Because of what happened to a Kabul government spokesman who was assassinated, because of the recent Sialkot by-election, or in support of Oun Chaudhry, who resigned as CM's coordinator in support of Jahangir Tarin.

She did not resign in support of those who killed PTI MPA Asad Khokhar's brother Mubashir at Asad's son's walima. CM Usman Buzdar was there, after telling Asad he was being taken back in the cabinet. Asad had been sacked last year because he wasn't doing well.

The killers proved it was an old enmity by leaving Buzdar alone. Still, that made it worse for the CM's security staff. Buzdar was just a witness, you see, not the target. That is probably not where you want the CM to be.



A romantic scene of a couple holding hands in a lush green garden. The woman is wearing a traditional Indian wedding outfit, a pink and gold lehenga with intricate embroidery, a matching dupatta, and a colorful necklace. The man is wearing a white kurta. They are standing on a green lawn with dense foliage in the background.

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