

# The Truth International

1<sup>st</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> September 2021

Mobile Phone Production

Pakistan starts hand-set manufacturing & export

Afghan Situation

Unexpected return of Taliban & reasons

Kabul Airport Blast

Biden vows to revenge the US military deaths

## We are Back Peacefully



Rs. 435

📍 205 D, 2nd Floor, Evacuee Trust Complex, Aga Khan Road, F-5/1, Islamabad, Pakistan.

🌐 [www.thetruthinternational.com](http://www.thetruthinternational.com) ☎ +92 51 2820180-1

# The Phoenix and the Carpet

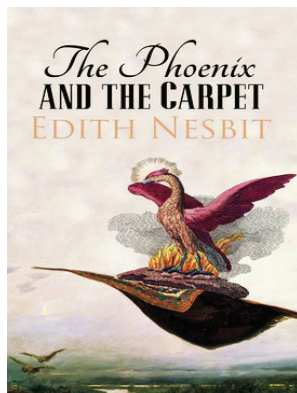
**Author:** Edith Nesbit

**Reviewed by:** Alizay Ashraf

**ISBN:** 978-0-14-0036739-3

**Pages:** 289

**Publisher:** Puffin Classics



The phoenix and the carpet is the spin-off of Five Children, and it gets in the fall of that very year, when the kids are starting to miss having magical adventures. Then, at that point one stormy day, on their way to the Bonfire Night, they choose to test a portion of their firecrackers inside their nursery. The outcome completely demolishes the rug. Their mom purchases a Persian mat to supplant it, which ends up being a wizardry wishing-cover which awards three wishes per day, and additionally, moved up in the carpet is the egg of the world's lonely Phoenix, which has been holding up an opportunity to hatch in someone's fire. Thus, it does.

I cherish this book and the series as a teenager. This book shipped me with its inventive plot, which makes me wish to go on the magical carpet too. It's one of those immortal kids' books that I trust children might in any case understand today.

In my opinion, I think the book is a fine and a pleasant novel. However, the plot is wordy and rough. The heroes are fairly ruined and ignored.

The Phoenix talks in a forcefully instructed, very much reproduced voice and is somewhat narcissistic. In any case, it is a fascinating aide on their actions with the delight cover, a great lot of which don't turn out as arranged. Indeed, things come to such a pass that it at long last becomes important to arrange both the floor covering and the phoenix.

But until that time, you can thrill with the children to such adventures as forcing a burglar to milk a cow in their nursery in order to feed 199 howling cats, leading their cook to become the queen of a tribe of savages on a tropical island, matching buried treasure to the poor landowners who desperately need it, and matching a pretty, nice spinster with an equally nice unmarried minister, getting stranded on a stranger's rooftop and finally, a night at the theatre that goes up in smoke and much more. This book is full of adventures!

The Phoenix is actually an adorable person, one of those that can be insightful and senseless all together, contacting and hilarious.

I love the scene where the Phoenix makes up a sonnet to make the sun come out on a blustery day, and again the scene where the Phoenix demands that the Phoenix Fire Insurance Office is a shelter in its respect. Overall, I liked reading this book and enjoyed it a lot because of the magical adventures. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 10 for the full enjoyment.

# The Hunchback of Notre-Dame

**Author:** Victor Hugo

**Reviewed by:** Alizay Ashraf

**ISBN:** 0-14-038253-4

**Pages:** 304

**Publisher:** Puffin Classics



The book the hunchback of Notre-Dame is a book by Victor Hugo, about Quasimodo, who was a distorted kid left at where orphans were kept for any individual who should take them in. He had such countless actual issues that one of the gossip ladies notice Claude Frollo, had been a promising researcher when his own folks died. In empathy he took in his more youthful sibling, Jehan, and raised him, and thoughts of what might have happened to Jehan if Claude had not been accessible pressured Claude to take in Quasimodo.

The novel was great and even gave details on the smallest specific things. I loved reading it as it got more and more interesting. The

book is full of vibrant scenes and full of humour. The writing is phenomenal, the enthusiasm behind it is truly exciting however I'm simply not intriguing in full parts with just engineering pictures.

I cherished the dull climate of the book, and the setting being in Paris. It's not altogether dull and terrible, there are times when it tends to be comical, yet it's fierce. The story was heart breaking and shocking, it truly showed how appearances and social situations in the public areas can be mesmerizing, and how brutal it very well may be for people who were acceptable.

The book felt really light compared to other classic books and I enjoyed that. The characters in the book communicated amazingly with each other. The book just shows us the important difference between caring and loving people and sick and selfish which I liked a lot. There is witchery, murder, attempted rape, hangings and torture. Each occurring several times, which may be a bit inappropriate for some readers.

I loved reading this book and had a great time understanding it. It may be a little offensive for children so I would recommend this book for children above the age of 13. I would also recommend this book to my friends and family. This is one of the few books that totally fascinated me.



# CONTENTS



## Editorial

Between hope and despair By M. Ziauddin-Page 04

## CITY NOTES

Bad taste not a crime yet By M A Niazi-Page 05

Women are Witches? By Hammad Ghaznavi-Page 06

## Foreign Affairs

Over 110 killed in two blasts outside Kabul Airport By Javed Mahmood-Page 07

The Wheels of the Taliban's Rise By Haq Nawaz-Page 09

Taliban's Herculean Challenges By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel-Page 11

"My Life Has Been Turned Upside Down" By Kaukab Jahan-Page 13

The Tricky Calculus of Pakistan's Afghan Policy By Umer Farooq-Page 14

The Day the World Changed By Syed Mushahid Hussain-Page 16

Taliban's Challenge By Dr Khalid Bajwa-Page 18

## Politics

On Tenterhooks over Afghan Situation By Khalid Wasim-Page 21

Shahbaz or Maryam By Ahmad Waleed-Page 24

Despite Lapses, PTI has much to boast of By Zain Rihat-Page 25

## Health

Delta Variant Blamed for Mortality Surge Among the Unvaxxed By Noor Aftab-Page 28

## Investigative

Christianity Under Roman Influence By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib-Page 29

The Rise of Islamophobia in the West By Mishaal Ashraf-Page 31

The Mother of All Allotments By Asadullah-Page 33

Pakistani Startups Eye Record Investment By Azeem Waqas-Page 35

Growing Our Startup Ecosystem By Azeem Waqas-Page 37

## Economy

36 Months of Khan-Do By Javed Mahmood-Page 39

Geoeconomics on Steroids By Khalique Ahmad-Page 42

Mobile-Phones Manufacturing in Pakistan Surpasses Cell-phones' Import By Javed Hussain-Page 44

Research Firm Bullish on Afghan Situation TTI Report-Page 46

## Sports

Heeding the Wakeup Call of Tokyo Olympics By Ali Abdullah-Page 47

Shaheens' Eventful Tour of the Caribbean By Ali Abdullah-Page 48

## Entertainment

Stuck in the Pipeline By Hasan Kazmi -Page 49

YouTube Pampers Creators with New Feature By Amna Shoaib-Page 51

Will Hollywood Ever Outgrow Ageism? By Haider Rifaat-Page 52

Pruning Our Entertainment Content By Gohar Imdad-Page 53

Where Have all the Comedy Writers Gone? By Benazir Mehdi-Page 54

**Publisher:** Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

**Editor:** Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

**Advisor to Editor:** Ashraf Malkham

**Printer:** Masha ALLAH Printers Basement # 9, Ratta Mansion, Fazal e Haq Road, Blue Area, Islamabad



# Between hope and despair

By M. Ziauddin

For twenty long years, American led NATO occupied Afghanistan under the guise of peace, nation-building, democracy and strategic harmony. But having miserably failed in any of these challenging endeavors, the US very sensibly decided in February 2020 to stop what was seemingly turning into a 'forever' war and entered into peace negotiations with the Taliban for troop withdrawal. But in this exercise as well the US seems to have bungled woefully. The twin-bomb carnage at the Kabul airport on Thursday seems to shaken the so-called transition process at its hinges. ISIS-Khorasan, the Islamic State's Afghanistan and Pakistan arm, took responsibility for the attack.

The agreement signed between the US and the Taliban on February 29, 2020 comprises four parts: 1. Guarantees and enforcement mechanisms that will prevent the use of the soil of Afghanistan by any group or individual against the security of the US and its allies; 2. Guarantees, enforcement mechanisms, and announcement of a timeline for the withdrawal of all foreign forces from Afghanistan; 3. Following the realization of the preceding two conditions the Taliban will start intra-Afghan negotiations with all Afghan sides; 4. A permanent and comprehensive ceasefire will be an item on the agenda of the intra-Afghan dialogue and negotiations. The participants of the intra-Afghan negotiations will discuss the date and modalities of a permanent and comprehensive ceasefire, including joint implementation mechanisms, which will be announced along with the agreement over the future political roadmap of Afghanistan.

Taliban has styled itself as a political entity ingrained in the country's peculiar geo-political culture. But the methods that it had employed for ruling Afghanistan during 1996-2001 and then the blatant resort, over the next 20 years, to the ruthless terror tactics while trying to win back the country it had lost in 2001 have won for it nothing but

world-wide notoriety of being a terrorist organization.

It was, therefore, but natural for the Afghans who did not subscribe to the political ideology of the Taliban to be concerned about their future in a country now virtually under the control of the self-styled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan. Therefore, the run on the Kabul airport all through the week since August 15 by Afghans who had cooperated with the occupying forces.

The new rulers will need a wide range of reconciliation efforts to settle-in for viable political governance. One cannot imagine law and order to come out of nowhere in a highly chaotic situation.

Nevertheless, for the last few days, Taliban leaders have been saying the right things on TV, on occasion even to female Afghan broadcasters. The Taliban claims it has changed. It insists it will honor the essential human rights of Afghans. Spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid vowed that the regime will respect women's rights — though, he was careful to qualify, within the norms of sharia law.

The offensive that ended with the fall of Kabul on August 15 was started in May. The Taliban swept up as many as 50 beleaguered district centers. Sometimes the army and police ran, leaving arms and vehicles behind. Sometimes they agreed to hand the district over to the Taliban, to avoid bloodshed and in return for safe passage. Sometimes, they resisted.

Seemingly a spontaneous collapse is by no means unprecedented in Afghan history. Defeats in the provinces have often caused Afghan regimes to unravel quickly, as supporters switch sides or lay down their arms rather than fight to the death. Taliban's initial rise to power, in the 1990s, its fall in 2001 and its return in recent weeks are examples of this phenomenon.

In Afghanistan, the traditional way of war often involves not confronting an enemy head-on but going to ground to fight a guerrilla war. The British, Soviets, and Americans—as well as the Taliban during their last stint in power—all found themselves on the receiving end of such guerrilla action.

The Soviet withdrawal in 1989, the Taliban's

first takeover in 1996, the U.S. intervention in 2001. Each time, violence returned before long, helped by Afghanistan's internal fissures, rugged terrain, scarce resources, and troublesome neighbors. The same obstacles to stable rule persist today. Even if they seem well positioned to enforce order, the Taliban still face real structural challenges.

One way or another, the Taliban are likely to find governing Afghanistan to be far more difficult than conquering it.

The "forever war" may have been a disaster for the bombed, invaded and impoverished "Afghan people," but to many inside the US it was an unmitigated success for the MICI-MATT (Military-Industrial-Counter-Intelligence-Media-Academia-Think Tank) complex. Anyone who bought stocks of Lockheed Martin, Northrop Grumman, Raytheon and the rest of that crowd is said to have made — literally — a killing.

The big business has used Afghanistan to wash money out of the tax bases of the US and Europe and back into the hands of a transnational security elite. The goal, therefore, for big business was an endless war, not a successful war. This explains the collapse of 350,000 strong, well trained, well equipped Afghan Army in the face of Taliban's terror filled guerrilla warfare

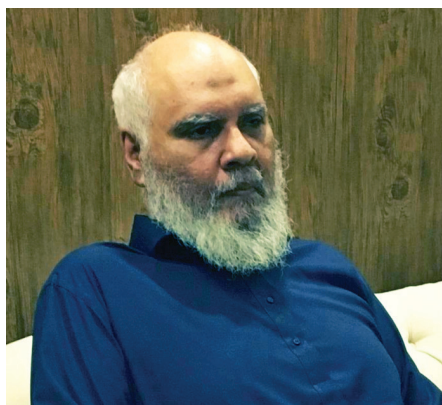
As the US withdrew from the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union, it ended Pakistan's security and economic assistance because of its nuclear weapons program, something the US had exempted before. In fact during the 1990s Pakistan was perhaps the most sanctioned country after Libya. Pakistan went from being the most allied of allies to the most sanctioned of adversaries. That is why perhaps Pakistan threw its support to the Taliban when they started gaining ground in the 1990s.

The American disaster in Afghanistan that Mr. Biden's impatience brought about is not a disaster just for the US. It has also been a huge boost for the Taliban, whose narrative now is that the believers, clad in the armor of the one true faith, have vanquished the infidels. That is bound to resonate around the world, and certainly next door in Pakistan where the Pakistani Taliban (TTP), which seeks the overthrow of their government — has certainly been emboldened.



# CITY NOTES: Bad taste not a crime yet

By M A Niazi



Instead of commiserating with Ayesha Akram, the victim of the Independence Day outrage, perhaps we should be thanking her. I mean, if the shikras who assaulted her had not been distracted, they would have probably been out on motorcycles, executing wheelies, and getting killed. Instead of attempting to gain independence from life, they showed their independence of any shame or good manners.

And there is much that TikTokers are guilty of, much that they deserve, but those are all offences against good taste, and surely they do not deserve such punishment as was given to the poor girl. Which among those assaulting her could put their hands on their hearts and swear they have never made an unfortunate post on social media?

Perhaps one reason for the incident was the police. Certainly, the suspension of the DIG (investigations), among others, indicates that the Lahore police was doing something wrong. Maybe the cops were blaming Ayesha Akram for not having filled her car's tank. Or having worn insufficient clothes. One misses the former CCPO Lahore, Umar Sheikh, for not being around for some good old-fashioned victim-blaming.

Some of the comments on social media seem driven more by anger at not having been there rather than at the event. The PM is lucky not to be accused, and is probably relieved that the incident occurred in Lahore, not Islamabad. He may be regretting his decision to let people phone in on him, after Ayesha got him, and let him have an earful. She wanted to be protected while exercising her right to celebrate Indepen-

dence Day the way men do. Unfortunately, men, as I said, seek liberty from life. Is that right to be protected?

However, in one respect, the episode proved that we are in the digital age. If there's no video going viral, it didn't happen. The incident may well have involved hundreds of people on Independence Day. But no one knew about it until the video went viral. Only then did the PM, the CM and the police get into action.

Another thing that emerged is that there's safety in numbers. No one person has been charged, unlike Bob Dylan, the rock star who was given the Nobel Prize for Literature for his lyrics, who has been sued for sexual abuse, committed back in 1965, by a woman who was only 12 at the time.

One effect of that charge has been to make the rapper R Kelly a front-runner for a future Nobel Literature Prize. He has been accused of, among other things, child pornography and kidnapping. The Swedish Academy itself, which decides the winner, awarded the 2018 Prize the next year, because of a sex-abuse scandal that year that had made it impossible for it to function. Dylan's 2016 prize had it made possible for rappers to dream of the award. But now it seems one has to have charges laid against one.

While there was so much concentration on the Minar-e-Pakistan incident, another nearby event almost slipped under the radar, the attack on the Ranjit Singh statue outside the Fort. I'm not sure what the motive was. The statue was not

torn down, which would be one motive borrowed from the USA, where they've been tearing down the statues of confederate generals. Or was the protest against any statues at all? Or did the protester want to say Ranjit Singh was never maharajah? Or was it a slightly late protest against his having ruled?

It might have been better to protest against the fall of Kabul. I'm a little surprised that no one has thought to blame Nawaz Sharif for everything. I mean, everyone is repeating that the Afghan National Army melted away because of corruption. Can there be any corruption without Nawaz?

That depends on a closer look at the First Test against the West Indies. Why did Pakistan lose by one wicket to one of the weakest teams in the game? And why did Shaheen Afridi take eight wickets? That showed that the West Indian team had no consideration for Imran Khan's future. And why did the team lose just as India won by 151 runs against England? Obviously, there had been dirty work at the crossroads, and not only is Babar Azam clearly an Indian agent, but he's also working for Nawaz, which is the same thing.

Cricket is in the news somehow. Nawaz's grandson and Maryam's son is going to get married to Saifur Rehman's daughter. Yes, the same Saifur Rehman who won the name Ehtesabur Rehman after heading the Ehtesab Bureau in Mian Nawaz's second tenure, and then Cricketur Rehman when he was appointed head of the Pakistan Cricket Board.



# Women are Witches?

By Hammad Ghaznavi

A whatsapp message, I just received, reads “List of places where Pakistani women are not safe:

1. Minar-e-Pakistan
2. Motorway
3. Political Jalsas
4. Workplace
5. With male relatives or friends
6. In a madrassa
7. In their school or college
8. At the market
9. In a bus
10. In their graves.”

This is not an imaginary or exaggerated list of places. The list of places. The list merely points out some of the places where recently incidents of violence, rape and torture against women have taken place in the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. By the day, situation in this regard is getting uglier. The number of crimes against women has risen dramatically in the recent times. Or has it always been as such, and now it just gets reported or recorded because of the new digital tools available?

There is an even bigger tragedy being witnessed in the aftermath of the crimes against women. The victim is blamed for the crime. Convoluted arguments are concocted, supporting the perpetrator of the crime, directly or in a round-about fashion. And we are not talking about a negligible section of the society. It's a sizable chunk of society involved in victim blaming. The highest offices of the land have done it more than once. This misogyny is wide spread among the masses. Ironically, it is in the name of Islam that the victims are criticized for the crimes. Examples are numerous.

Last year on 9th September, a woman was raped by two men on Lahore Ring Road, in the presence of her children, as their car ran out of fuel at night. The next day, the police officer in-charge of the city, Umer Shiekh repeatedly told the media that it was the woman's fault that led to her rape. “Why she had not taken a busier road;



why she didn't check her fuel before departing; Pakistan was not France,” he said, referring to the victim's nationality. Just read the mindset of the people tasked with the protection of citizens, women included. It is frightening!

Noor Muqaddam was brutally murdered in Islamabad because she had an ‘unislamic’ lifestyle, was the argument of many ‘good Muslims’. Going by that principle of piety, many of us may be killed, cutting down the country's population to half, or quarter, or even lesser. Such response sounds crazier than the crime itself.

The 14th August incident at Minar-e-Pakistan, wherein a girl was physically assaulted and sexually harassed by around 400 men, elicited the same misogynistic response from the ‘good Muslims’. “The girl made suggestive gestures while shooting the footage for Tiktok...and she came to the park with a na-mehram boy,” is the gist of the arguments of the victim blamers. The government was so moved by the incident that it seriously debated a ban on the TikTokers in public parks. Those who cannot even diagnose the disease, can they be trusted with the treatment?

“We have distanced ourselves from Islam; we have forgotten the doomsday; we have

to return to our religion to fix crimes against women,” are the usual arguments of the clergy and co. after every crime against women. Sir, have you ever analyzed why the women of the un-Islamic west are much safer in their countries?

Until we diagnose the problem right, we cannot resolve it. We, as a society, have to realize that the problem lies with us, almost all of us. Just imagine, a state and society where the law enjoins upon a rape victim to find witnesses. How long can we live with these anomalies that have marginalized the women to this point? How long can we blame the ‘improper’ dress of a female for her rape? How long can we conclude fahashi and uryani to be our cardinal sins responsible for all our ills?

Data reveals that a majority of rapes takes place in the rural areas of Pakistan. Do our rural female folks wear skimpy, tempting clothes? No! Most of these victims are burqa or chadar clad. Who are we trying to fool? Zainab of Qasur was 6 years old. A three years old girl was raped in Dadu. An incident of necrophilia with the corpse of a 14 year old girl in Thatha took place last month. Who are we trying to fool? First, we have to admit ‘we’ are sick as a society only then can we cure ourselves.



# Over 110 killed in two blasts outside Kabul Airport

*US-Taliban blame ISIL-K for targeting American troops, Afghan citizens. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the blasts occurred in US troops' security zones outside airport*



By Javed Mahmood

**I**SLAMABAD: More than 100 people have been killed in twin blasts outside Kabul airport on Thursday night (Aug 26). About 100 Afghan nationals and 13 US troops are among those who have died in attack on Kabul airport.

Taliban and other media reports claimed that 28 members of Taliban have also died in this twin blasts' attack which targeted the people and US personnel outside Kabul airport. Earlier, media reports indicated 85 casualties in Kabul airport blasts. At least 13 US soldiers were also killed in Thursday's blasts, the worst single-day loss for American troops in Afghanistan since the August 2011.

The US troops helping to evacuate Afghans desperate to flee Taliban rule are bracing for more attacks. Thursday's attack was claimed by ISIL (ISIS) offshoot in Afghanistan, The Islamic State in Khorasan Province, ISKP (ISIS-K), which said its suicide bombers singled out "translators and collaborators with the American army".

US President Joe Biden pledged to retaliate against the attack in Kabul, confirming that the bombings were carried out by ISIS-K. "We will hunt you down and make you pay. I will defend our interests in our people with every measure at my command," he said.

Taliban says 28 of its members killed in airport blasts

At least 28 members of the Taliban are among the people killed in explosions overnight outside the airport in Kabul, Afghanistan, a Taliban official told Reuters news agency.

"We have lost more people than the Americans," said the official, who declined to be identified. He said there was no reason to extend the August 31 deadline for foreign forces to leave the country.

Australia pulled out its troops ahead of Kabul blasts

Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison announced on Friday (Aug 27) his country has already completed

its evacuation operations in Afghanistan. The country pulled out its troops out Kabul just before the bombings on Thursday, after receiving "very clear intelligence" of an impending attack. "We were able to ensure the departure of the remaining Australian personnel over the course of last night, not that long before the terrible events that unfolded last night took place," Morrison said at a news conference.

He also said that American and British forces had helped Australia over nine days to evacuate some 4,100 people, including 3,200 Australians and Afghan citizens with Australian visas.

US President orders military strikes against ISIS-Khorasan

US President Joe Biden ordered American military commanders to develop operational plans to strike ISIS-Khorasan assets, leadership and facilities as the death toll of suicide blasts at Kabul airport rose to over 100. Two blasts and gunfire rocked the area outside the airport on Thursday evening, witnesses said. Videos shot

by Afghan journalists showed dozens of bodies strewn around a canal on the edge of the airport. A health official and a Taliban official said the toll of Afghans killed had risen to over 100 people, including 28 Taliban members. The US military said 13 of its service members were killed. The ISIS-Khorasan, an Islamic State affiliate militant outfit claimed responsibility. ISIS, an enemy of the Taliban as well as the West, said one of its suicide bombers targeted “translators and collaborators with the American army”.

“To those who carried out this attack, as well as anyone who wishes America harm, know this: We will not forgive. We will not forget. We will hunt you down and make you pay,” said Biden while addressing his nation from the White House soon after the attack. “We will respond with force and precision, at our time, at the place we choose and at the moment of our choosing,” he said. “I will defend our interests and our people with every measure at my command.”

Biden also indicated that he could send more military assistance to Afghanistan if he felt the need for it. “I’ve instructed the military (to act) with whatever they need. If they need additional force, I will grant it,” he said. The attacks, he said, had only increased the determination of the US military to carry on its mission. Biden said that the service members who lost their lives in Kabul on Thursday were “heroes” and “the best the country has to offer”.

“The lives we lost today were lives given in the service of liberty, the service of security, the service of others, in the service of America,” he said. He also defended relying on the Taliban to provide security outside the Kabul airport.

“We are counting on them to act in their own self-interest,” he said. “And it’s in their interest that we leave when we said we would. There is no evidence thus far from our commanders in the field that there has been collusion between Taliban and ISIS.”

US on alert for more attacks

General Frank McKenzie, head of US Central Command, said US commanders were on alert for more attacks by ISIS, including possible rockets or vehicle-borne

bombs targeting the airport.

“We’re doing everything we can to be prepared,” he said, adding that some intelligence was being shared with the Taliban and that he believed “some attacks have been thwarted by them.” A video taken in the aftermath of the attack showed corpses in a wastewater canal by the airport fence, some being fished out and laid in heaps while wailing civilians searched for loved ones.

“I saw bodies and body parts flying in the air like a tornado blowing plastic bags,” said one Afghan witness. “That little water flowing in the sewage canal had turned into blood.” Zubair, a 24-year-old civil engineer, said he was close to a suicide bomber who detonated explosives. “Men, women and children were screaming. I saw many injured people — men, women and children — being loaded into private vehicles and taken toward the hospitals,” he said.

Chaotic evacuation

A US Central Command spokesperson said 18 soldiers wounded in the attack were “in the process of being aero-medically evacuated from Afghanistan on specially equipped C-17s with embarked surgical units”.

A Taliban official lamented the number of Taliban members killed in the ISIS attack. “We have lost more people than the Americans in the airport blast,” a Taliban official said, adding that the Taliban was “not responsible for the chaotic evacuation plan prepared by foreign nations”. A Nato country diplomat in Kabul said all foreign forces were aiming to evacuate their citizens and embassy employees by Aug 30. The Taliban would tighten security around the airport, said the diplomat. “Security is their responsibility,” the diplomat said, adding that the Taliban should investigate the Islamic State network.

Blasts occurred in US troops’ security zone

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said that the explosions outside Kabul airport were ‘terrorist attacks’ which occurred areas which were under the security control of the US troops at Kabul airport. In a statement, the spokesman

said, “The group had provided information to the Americans about possible The Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) terrorist attacks on Kabul airport.” He said that it was the responsibility of the US troops to maintain the security of the areas where blasts took place on Aug 26.

“The Taliban are committed to the international community and will not allow terrorists to use Afghanistan as a base for their operations,” he added. Zabihullah told that US troops were responsible to ensure security at the places where blasts occurred. The third blast was controlled, he stated.

Foreign passengers arriving from Kabul to stay in Islamabad hotels to get transit flights

Islamabad administration has directed the managements of all hotels in the capital city to stop local booking for 21 days, starting from Aug 27 (Friday). In a letter issue to all hotels today, district magistrate, Islamabad Capital Territory, stated that in view of the situation across the border, thousands of people are being evacuated from Afghanistan and passengers from transition flights are staying in Islamabad.

Therefore, in order to facilitate the foreign passengers arriving from Afghanistan, all hotels in Islamabad are directed to stop local reservation of rooms for at least 21 days with effect from Aug 28, 2021. Also, the vacant rooms may be placed at the disposal of the ICT administration for accommodation of passengers till further orders. Focal person from the ICT administration will be ADCG, ICT Rana Waqas Anwar.

Worth noting is that evacuation of foreigners from Kabul has been expedited in the backdrop of two blasts outside the Kabul airport in which more than 100 people, including 28 Taliban and 13 US troops have been killed. High threat alerts were already issued about these blasts two days ahead of the tragic incidents. Even few hours before twin blasts, media reported possibility of attack on Kabul airport within few hours citing intelligence sources.



# The Wheels of the Taliban's Rise

*A quick look at the actors and factors that made possible the Taliban's swift return to power in Afghanistan.*



By Haq Nawaz

The Taliban's lightning fast campaign to take the whole of Afghanistan (except the much storied Panjshir) sent waves of shock and alarm across the world. One of reasons for the widespread bewilderment over the development was an utter lack of understanding of its drivers.

It may therefore be useful to take a look at the wheels of and deals made possible the erstwhile insurgent militia's rumble from the hinterlands of Afghanistan to the corridors of power.

Based on reports and analysis, The Truth International (TTI) can report that this relatively peaceful transition of power was made possible by concerned Afghan elders working separately at national and local-level.

Suhail Shaheen, a political office spokesman, has confirmed in an interview the Taliban used their links that they established during the last one and a half years. Led by Amir Khan Muttaqi, the Taliban's commission for Dawat Wal

Irshad has also been active in the peripheries to convince the people to join them and abandon the Ghani administration.

Some senior Taliban leaders like Maulvi Muhammad Yaqoob, Amir Khan Muttaqi, and Khalifa Siraj Uddin Haqqani have successfully engaged the local clerics, the tribal elders, and some officials at the provincial governments to isolate Kabul.

In many districts and provinces, the top officials were provided safe passage and protection by Taliban. In Herat Commander Ismail Khan peacefully surrendered to Taliban through a political settlement.

Another reason for this quickest fall of Ghani government was the decentralised tribal society in Afghanistan. In the absence of any centralised political structure, local tribal elders make decisions based on their own situation.

Political parties are limited to some provinces and districts and have no centralised hierarchy. The weak political

parties system also helped Taliban, a network of networks guided by a powerful centralised leadership council.

The sudden fall of Kabul within days of military campaign by the Taliban fighters have raised many eyebrows. But truth be told, there was already the talk of the Ashraf Ghani government not being able to survive once the American and international forces pull out of Afghanistan.

In the end, it took only days to send the Ghani administration packing. It was 6 August 2021 when Taliban took control of Zaranj, the provincial capital of Nimruz, the first provincial capital to slip into the hands of the Taliban.

On 11 August, Zabihullah Mujahid in his media statement claimed that they have captured 9 provinces. After four more days, every last one of Afghanistan's thirty-four provincial capitals had fallen to the Taliban. Within no time, Taliban reached the gates of Kabul but the mood was not to resist them. On their part, the Taliban announced they would not enter

into the Kabul until a political settlement was reached.

The Afghan capital was besieged by the Taliban fighters lying in wait for a political solution to catch up. Suddenly reports started pouring in that the Afghan security forces were abandoning their posts, prompting the Taliban to take control of the posts.

Taliban issued a statement, asking their fighters to take control of the abandoned posts to avoid any security lapse. Some incidents of looting and plundering by the people were reported. Then came the news of Ashraf Ghani leaving the country, confirmed by Dr Abdullah Abdullah.

Afghan elders including former Afghan President Hamid Karzai and Dr Abdullah played a role to fill the political vacuum during the transition. A high-level delegation of the former Northern Alliance left for Pakistan to discuss the post-Ghani scenario.

The Taliban's first priority was to establish their writ in capital Kabul as well in the provinces. With that out of the way, efforts to form an inclusive government have started in earnest – although no one knows what type of government that will be.

The province of Panjshir remains the last holdout of the anti-Taliban forces. Forces



of the Taliban and the Panjshir Resistance Movement led by Ahmad Masoud, the son of the legendary Ahmad Shah Masoud, are eyeball to eyeball. This is the test case for Taliban: Can they reach a peaceful settlement with their opponents? If it comes to fighting, can they defeat Masoud?

The Taliban have sent hundreds of fighters under the leadership of Qari Fasih Uddin, a senior commander who also served as governor of Badakhshan. Qari Fasih is an ethnic Tajik and aware of the terrain of the Panjshir valley. If talks fail, the front may hot up in no time.

There have been reports for the last few days that say some elders from both sides are striving to broker a peaceful deal.

Above everything else, the Taliban, Kabul government, and the world at large were aware of the feelings of the Afghans, who are weary of war and want peace. They have seen enough warfighting, violence, and displacements over multiple rounds of civil strife spanning almost five decades. Nearly 300,000 Afghans were displaced just in the recent months.

The Taliban leadership is deep in consultations, both internally and with other political groups, which is only fitting: They have a vast and diverse country to mind.

 **The Truth International**

# Do You Want to Write a blog for us ?

Please contribute at Blogger Desk: [Info@tti.org.pk](mailto:Info@tti.org.pk)



# Taliban's Herculean Challenges

*Ever since they took Kabul, the born-again Taliban have been generous in promises. Now is the time to match those words with actions.*



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

The war is now over. We have forgiven those who shed our blood, so everyone is forgiven. People have nothing to fear. Women will have the freedom to work according to the law. The media will be free to report. Negotiations are underway for a new political disposition, which will decide the flag and constitution of Afghanistan. The territory of Afghanistan will not be used against anyone.

Those are the claims Afghan Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid made as he was addressing a crowded press conference in Kabul for the first time since the former insurgent group's return to power.

Much has changed in Kabul. Even the

Taliban have changed. The Taliban shown on cameras are in their twenties, thirties, and forties, and have smartphones. They have sneakers on their feet. They are dressed in colorful clothes and taking selfies. A female anchor on a TV screen is interviewing the Taliban leader live.

Someone is firing in the air outside the city, the Taliban run and stop him and slap him. Taliban leader Anas Haqqani has been invited to tea at the home of former Afghan President Hamid Karzai. Taliban fighters are attending Shiite gatherings in the city. The embassies of Russia, China, Iran and Pakistan are fully operational in the city.

How did all this happen? It is a long story spanning two decades. But for those in the

region, the most pressing questions are what all this means for the other militant groups in the region like the globally-minded Al Qaeda, or those who have Pakistan in their sights, like the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and the Baloch separatists.

What will be the future policy of the Taliban? And what are the future challenges for the Taliban in the coming days?

As far as al-Qaeda and the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan are concerned, one thing is for sure: The Taliban have guaranteed that Afghan soil will not be used to attack any other country. Al-Qaeda, for its part, is a Wahhabi inclined organization with an international agenda. It has had ties with Iran in the past.



Right now, they need a peaceful place in the world to live with their families. The differences that developed over 9/11 between Al-Qaeda and the then Taliban leadership for the use of Afghanistan as a launching ground is a known fact. So for the time they are happy with this refuge, and limited rest they have found in Afghanistan.

As far as the Pakistani Taliban are concerned, the influence and infrastructure of the Afghan Taliban are such that they will absorb the majority of the Pakistani Taliban. It is possible that this process will lead to a split in the Pakistani Taliban and that some Pakistani Taliban commanders will turn to other organizations in the region.

The Islamic State in Khorasan (ISIK) is waiting in the wings for this stage to come. This Afghan branch of ISIS believes that the Taliban's rise to power will increase the problems for the Taliban, leading large numbers of fighters to defect to ISIK.

The Baloch insurgents are based in the Kandahar province of Afghanistan, adjacent to the Balochistan province of Pakistan. Problems have certainly increased for them. Even before this change of power in Afghanistan, their relations with the Taliban were not good.

Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban. After the death of Baloch commander Aslam Achho in a suicide attack in Kandahar, Baloch resistance fighter Dr. Allah Nazar is likely to have moved to Iran. He was already very skeptical about Afghanistan.

There are possibilities that the Baloch have been told to close training camps since the fall of Kandahar, to live their lives in peace and forget any kind of resistance inside Pakistan for now. For those who do not follow these instructions, the only way left is to move to Iran or Pakistan.

Meanwhile, Pakistan has already opened contacts with the exiled Baloch political leadership. It remains to be seen how long this political solution will work.

It is pertinent to mention here that the Baloch are facing another problem and that is religious extremism. If the armed Baloch soldiers take the path of sectarian based ISIS, then Balochistan may face a serious problem along with the adjacent region.



There is also suspense around the world about what the Taliban's policies will be in the future. Only time can answer that question but based on the information available at the moment, an outline seems to be emerging.

Another interesting development is that, unlike in the past, the Taliban movement is breaking free of the puritanical Wahabi interpretation of Islam. In the past, important decisions made by the Taliban have been influenced by the money and globalist Wahabi ideas of high-profile Arab fighters allied with al Qaeda, who are not visible this time.

The group therefore seems to be gravitating towards the relatively politically moderate Deobandi school. The more inclusive Deobandi approach is reflected in the Taliban's changed attitude towards the Shiites.

In Pakistan, we have seen a more democratic form of them in the form of Muttahida Majlis-e-Amal, an alliance of Deobandi clerics who ruled between 2002 and 2008 in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

There is no doubt that we will see a demonstration of the political power of religious circles in the future. But scenes of public whipping, stoning, blowing up buildings, and boasting of the presence of global militants are now a thing of the past. It seems that the parliament will be replaced by a shura and programs based on Islamic teachings will be aired on TV.

The system of Hasba, a police force dedicated to enforcing public morality, will be introduced in place of the police but so far, it would be premature to say anything. As far as the veil is concerned, it is important to note the burqa was there even under US controlled Afghanistan, but now its prevalence will increase a little more.

That is why the initial features of the media policy stated that the media would be completely independent and neutral and would not promote disunity. It is now up to

the entire Afghan people to what extent they defend their freedoms.

As far as foreign affairs are concerned, the Taliban have visited many capitals, including Qatar, Moscow, Beijing, Tehran, and of course Islamabad. The confidence and satisfaction of the diplomats inside these embassies in Kabul is a testament to the fact that all matters have been settled and they have come to Kabul aboard a US ship.

The precise contours of the settlements with these countries will become known soon. The fact is that with the cooperation of these countries, half of the Taliban's problems will already be solved as most of these countries have already assured them of their support.

The most important question is that what are the challenges for the Taliban. The first challenge, of course, is to digest what they have achieved so quickly. Then the atmosphere of fear inside Afghanistan has to be ended and the large part of a population that has been mentally prepared to oppose them has to be brought across the line.

Internally, the biggest challenge will be law and order. In the past, if there had been violence, the responsibility would have been shifted to the United States or the then regime. The government has its own compulsions. Now the responsibility rests squarely with the Taliban. They are no longer fighting in the mountains and nor are their own lives in danger.

A major challenge facing the Taliban right now, along with issues of economy and governance, is what to do with the thousands of fighters have trained over the past 20 years. Their foremost challenge, however, is how to form a government that includes all these elements with their differing motives and goals, and secure global recognition as a legitimate government.



# “My Life Has Been Turned Upside Down”

*A peep into the deeply disturbed mind of an Afghan social activist torn by the dilemma of staying back or leaving Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover.*



By Kaukab Jahan

Nilofar Ayoubi had never harboured the thought of leaving Afghanistan – and she still hopes to stay back in her country. But she is not sure – friends in the know have informed her the Taliban have put her name on a hit list because of her activism and advocacy for human and women’s rights.

Nilofar fears for her own safety and for the lives of her family, especially her three children. Her youngest daughter is just a few months old.

“It is very uncertain what is going to happen next here”, she told The Truth International (TTI) over telephone. “So I probably would wait for a few days to decide whether I should stay or leave the country. In the meantime I at least want to send my children out of Afghanistan but again [I am] still unable to think properly and take a decision due to the shock of the sudden upheaval.”

A mother of three, Nilofar belongs to the more affluent class of Afghanistan, and has been living in Kabul for the last six or seven years. She is associated with an NGO and has been very vocal against extremist policies of Taliban.

Nilofar explained the depressed mental state she has been in for the last few weeks, adding she might be able to decide something that after sending her children to

a safer place. She will probably stay back in Afghanistan – depending of course upon how things unfold in the coming days.

The lightning speed with which the Taliban’s sprang from their peripheral haunts to capture major cities including Kabul left the world shell shocked – and Farah shares the shock. “I didn’t have any idea that it would happen so sudden.

“I was hopeful that they would create an interim government of three to six months which will provide choice to people whether they want to remain in or get out from Afghanistan. If it was so, the situation would be far different from today’s”.

Talking about the current situation in the country, Nilofar said that there is chaos everywhere. “Everything is muddled up and everyone is concerned about their safety. No one is ready to leave the earnings and properties which they have acquired from the hard work of the last 20 years. [On the other hand], the statements from the Taliban regime are not very hopeful. That is why there is a complete uncertainty in the whole country. “

Nilofar sees the situation getting worse in the future, as there is resentment against Taliban rule has already started to surface. “We have started to witness it in Panjshir and I am sure that it would spread all over the country and turn into a civil war”, she

theorises.

She is also concerned about the status of Afghanistan with the rest of the world as the Taliban regime is yet to secure diplomatic recognition from the comity of nations.

She is critical of the harsh early steps taken by the Taliban and is especially troubled by the release of thousands of criminals from the jails all over the country. “This is a very grave situation as these criminals also include gangsters, kidnapers, and terrorists. It is for sure that they will involve themselves again in bloodshed and killings. Then, the situation is not only uncertain but bleak.”

Besides the overall situation in the country Farah admits that this takeover has left her deeply disturbed on a personal level. “The current situation has robbed me of my whole life in a snap – my business, my 20 years of work, my hard earned money, my security, everything.

“In a matter of a few days, my life has been turned upside down. It is really unbelievable. I am still in shock and still trying to process what has happened.”

The activist interviewed above has been evacuated to Poland. We can now reveal

# The Tricky Calculus of Pakistan's Afghan Policy

*The United States is withdrawing and regional players are moving in to fill the vacuum, but is that all?*

By Umer Farooq

The regional response to Taliban's military takeover of government in Afghanistan is mostly supportive. Iran has described withdrawal of US troops and subsequent events as a good omen for the national reconciliation in Afghanistan. Russia does not perceive any threat to itself or to its Central Asian client states from Taliban return to power. China wants to develop diplomatic relations with the Taliban government. And people in the Pakistani state machinery are euphoric over their "strategic assets" taking over the reins of power in Afghanistan.

This evolving regional response is highly favourable to Taliban primarily because in the past civil wars in Afghanistan have always been fuelled by one of more of the neighbours of this war-torn country providing weapons, training, and finances to the one of the other side in the internal conflict. Now it seems all the neighbours are happy with the rise of the Taliban.

During the peak of US presence in Afghanistan, the US intelligence reportedly presented the US Administration with the information that Iran and Russia both were providing weapons, intelligence support, and finances to Taliban for attacks on US forces inside Afghanistan.

It is also well known that the Afghan Taliban, at the behest of Russians and Iranians, have carried out operations against Daesh affiliated groups in Northern and Eastern Afghanistan, in the period between 2014 and 2016, when there was a sudden rise in the profile of ISIS in Afghanistan. Pakistan's ISI even hosted the intelligence chiefs of Russia, Iran, and China in Islamabad for a conference in July 2018 where it was agreed that the four intelligence services would coordinate their efforts against the rise of ISIS in Afghanistan.

Does this mean that Russia and Iran have a working relationship with the Afghan Taliban? Does it also mean that for regional players the conservative Taliban are more acceptable than the radical ISIS, which,



according to reports, were emerging inside Afghanistan? There are no clear answers to these questions as of now.

Iran has welcomed withdrawal of foreign troops and Russia has indicated willingness to use military force to protect its regional allies like Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Taliban are not mentioned as a threat in any of the Russian statements, although it is obvious heightened political instability or violence will be inimical to the interests of these states.

According to Pakistani officials and experts, Russians are particularly wary of the rise of ISIS in Northern Afghanistan close to its border with Central Asian States including Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Russia still considers the security of Central Asia States as their prime responsibility. However, Russians have been discussing this problem with Taliban leaders and see Taliban as a potential ally against ISIS and other extremist groups emerging in Northern Afghanistan.

The story of ISIS in Afghanistan is one of persistent decline. After a dramatic rise in Afghanistan from 2014 to 2016 with membership running into the thousands, the group has seen its power steadily wane. Over the last two years, the group has suffered back-to-back losses against US and Afghan military operations in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar.

These losses have been compounded by the Afghan Taliban's separate military campaign against the Islamic State. The Islamic State is reported to command around 2,200 fighters, but its overall trajectory is marred by defections of leaders and rank-and-file, loss of territory, and fragmentation of battlefield allies.

Can Pakistan afford to go along with this developing and favourable regional response to Taliban's military takeover of Afghanistan? Pakistan's Foreign Policy establishment is confronted with a much more complex set of foreign policy challenges and Afghanistan is just one piece of the bigger jigsaw.

The Taliban victory cannot overshadow all other aspects of Pakistan's foreign policy and it is unlikely that Pakistani foreign policy establishment would get carried away and act under the sway of this victory of their strategic allies in Afghanistan.

First and foremost, Islamabad has to be mindful of its own financial situation, for which it is dependent on Washington's nod for IMF and World Bank loans. This would remain a dominant factor in determining a country's foreign policy directions and its position in the geopolitical chessboard in the regional power struggles in the foreseeable future.

Pakistan cannot afford to get on board the



regional bandwagon led by countries like Russia, China, and Iran that seem to be moving towards completely excluding America from influencing events in Afghanistan and Central Asia. China and Russia are opposed to any move to provide bases to US forces in Central Asia.

American forces will be withdrawn completely from Afghanistan in the coming months. At the political level, the protégés of Washington have been squarely defeated in Afghanistan's power struggle and pro-American forces are in complete disarray.

The politically ascendant Taliban are in a close embrace with Iranian and Russian security establishments. Experts say that Taliban leaders regularly consult Russian and Iranian officials before taking any major step or deciding on a new course of action.

One clear element that demonstrates that Islamabad doesn't seem to be in the mood of completely breaking with Washington on Afghanistan is the latest Foreign Office comment on Afghan situation in which the mandarins of our foreign policy thought it appropriate to mention human rights and women rights as a determining factor in its policy and attitude towards the new Afghan government.

Human rights and women rights are not a factor in the stated policy towards Taliban of any of the regional countries including Russia, China and Iran. Such high ideals are exclusive to Washington and its western cousins. How far can Islamabad match its action with the words of its human and women rights policy is difficult to predict for the moment, but it is safe to say Islamabad doesn't seem to completely ignore Washington's concern.

There is also a possibility that Washington itself wanted the regional countries to take responsibility for managing the security of Afghanistan as it would have appeared natural for anyone making guesses about Afghanistan that the vacuum left behind by the withdrawing American forces would be filled by regional powers.

Regional power now seems to be providing support to the Taliban's military takeover by awarding them political legitimacy in the form of acceptance of their advances

and victories. There are very strong voices in Washington accusing rising powers like China to be the beneficiaries of Americans sacrifices in blood and treasure.

The objective that Afghanistan should not become a hotbed of terrorism and Sunni militancy is a common aim shared by the United States with all regional players including Russia, China, and Iran.

A simplistic analysis would suggest that the future scenario would only see a change of guards in the region. While previously it was American military handling the security in and around Afghanistan, now the regional militaries and security apparatuses would act as a supervisor for security in Afghanistan with Taliban acting as a surrogate of regional powers.



All the regional powers have an interest in not letting Afghanistan become a hub of terrorism and militancy, although the motivation stems from each country's own security calculus. Iran is concerned with the rise of Sunni militancy in Western Afghanistan, Russia is deeply concerned about rise of Daesh in Northern Afghanistan, and China is concerned about its Uighur militants finding safe harbour in Afghanistan.

The last scenario may be hypothetical at the moment, but the Pakistani security establishment will hit a goldmine if this scenario materializes.

Pakistani, Iranian, Russian and Chinese intelligence services have been coordinating their efforts in Afghanistan to prevent the rise of ISIS in the war torn country since 2018. Will that mean Pakistan be playing a

central role in the regional efforts to prevent the rise of ultra-extremist Sunni groups in Afghanistan?

Two strong pointers in that direction are Pakistan's more than normal influence on Afghan Taliban, a factor which will make Islamabad an effective player; and the considerable experience of tackling the Sunni militancy and terrorism in the region the Pakistani security apparatus has amassed. Not surprisingly both Russia and China have expressed an interest in learning from this experience.

The task before Pakistani foreign policy establishment will be to make all this acceptable for Washington. A destabilized Afghanistan will be a public relations disaster for Washington as well. However,

a scenario in which the Taliban as winners takes all is unlikely to be palatable for Washington.

All considered, some kind of national reconciliation in Afghanistan where pro-American political forces are given legitimacy within the new Afghan system, is what the Pakistani security establishment should aspire to achieving in the coming days.

That would mean Pakistan would again be a frontline state – a frontline state with its backers sitting not just in Washington but also in Beijing, Moscow, and Tehran.

# The Day the World Changed

*The return of the Taliban has pulled down the curtain on the American Century.*



By Syed Mushahid Hussain

August 15 will probably go down in history as the day that marked the formal end of the 'American Century' and the beginning of the 'Asian Century'. On that day, the US-propped Kabul regime collapsed, with its head fleeing with around \$169 million cash stashed in his luggage, and the ignominious, panicky exit of the American military coincided with the surprisingly swift but subdued return of the Afghan Taliban back to power after 20 years. Messy exits are now a hallmark of the US in the Third World countries it once dominated, but 'incompetence' was never an adjective that described the American way of doing things, until Kabul last week.

The dizzying speed of these developments reinforce what Lenin once said: "There are decades when nothing happens; and then there are weeks when decades happen!"

There is now a glimmer of hope that the 42-year old Afghan conflict can perhaps come to an end after three Afghan Wars

(1979-1989 'Afghan Jihad' funded by the US against the Soviet occupation), then the Afghan Civil War (1989-2001), and finally the 'War of Terror' undertaken by the US after 9/11.

President Carter's National Security Adviser Dr Zbigniew Brzezinski claimed in his memoir, *Power and Principle*, that Carter had signed a directive on July 3, 1979, to start funding the dissident Afghan Mujahideen with an initial funding of \$695,000 which would be distributed by the CIA via Pakistan. This was six months before the Soviet military invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979.

Eventually, Afghanistan became the centre of CIA's biggest covert operation after WWII, codenamed Operation Cyclone. When the Geneva Accords were signed a decade later, providing the framework for the defeated Red Army's exit from Afghanistan, almost \$5 billion had been funnelled for this guerilla war, with Saudi Arabia

providing matching funds to the American money (\$2.1 billion each), plus another \$1 billion from other countries over a 10-year period. Over 100,000 Afghan Mujahideen had been trained and armed, besides about 10,000 Arab and other Muslim volunteers. The Afghan Taliban, who now are in power, are the ideological offspring of the Afghan Mujahideen, some actually having fought in the war against the Red Army.

During an interview with French newspaper *Le Nouvel Observateur* published in its issue of January 15-21, 1998, Dr Brzezinski was asked whether he had regrets in funding a struggle that spawned religious extremism, destabilising parts of both the Muslim and Western worlds, he answered without batting an eyelid: "What is more important in world history? The Taliban or the collapse of the Soviet Empire? Some agitated Muslims or the liberation of Central Europe and end of the Cold War?"

It was largely an American-created genie



that the US tried, albeit abortively, to put back into the bottle when Washington, under President George W Bush, launched the 'War on Terror' after 9/11. Pakistan was coerced into joining the war, although India was the first in the region to offer unstinted cooperation to the American war effort. And Saudi Arabia too was cajoled into the post 9/11 war effort because it feared American reprisals as 15 of the 19 hijackers that attacked the Twin Towers in New York and the Pentagon in Washington were from Saudi Arabia (of the remaining four, two were from Egypt and one each from Lebanon and the UAE).

America's Afghanistan Project came unstuck for three reasons starting in 2003.

First, that year, an over-confident US went to war with Iraq, instead of stabilising and strengthening Afghanistan. The US shifted attention to Iraq, fighting a war of choice because of Bush's ideological foreign policy fixation, when he labelled Iraq, Iran and North Korea as part of the 'Axis of Evil', although none of these countries had anything to do with 9/11; and, in fact, Iran had actively cooperated with the US in the removal of the Taliban regime.

The second reason was an inability to learn lessons from history due to imperial hubris and US duplicity with allies like Pakistan. Just before the Anglo-American invasion of Afghanistan on October 7, 2001, a top-secret British delegation was in Moscow seeking 'expert advice' from the Russian experience in Afghanistan. Their advice was instructive, but never followed: "You will make the same bad choice we did, you will go in, you will lose, many of you will die and then you'll be forced to retreat, which will be good for us".

Regarding duplicity with allies, for example, in his book, *Lawless World*, Philippe Sands reveals the contents of a telephone conversation between President Bush and Prime Minister Tony Blair on January 30, 2003, just a few weeks before the launch of the war on Iraq on March 20. In that conversation, Bush tells Blair that he "wanted to go beyond Iraq in dealing with WMD proliferation, mentioning in particular Saudi Arabia, Iran, North Korea and Pakistan", at a time when Pakistan and



Saudi Arabia were supposedly US allies. And by 2005, the US, in another example of double-dealing with Pakistan, violating its own laws as well as IAEA rules, went ahead to sign a major civil nuclear deal with India, with a view to roping in India against

China, backed later by massive armaments and sophisticated technology to India, to the detriment of Pakistan.

The third reason for failure – apart from the confusion why the US was in Afghanistan – was the US perpetuating its military presence by propping up a small self-serving corrupt Kabul elite dependent on doleouts from Washington. To expect any self-respecting Afghan soldier to lay down his life for such a corrupt clique was delusional, to say the least. The Washington Post did an excellent expose of the deception and lies that lay at the heart of America's ill-fated Afghanistan Project, by publishing the Afghanistan Papers in November 2019, as there was a yawning chasm between what was publicly stated and what was privately believed.

On the eve of the 20th anniversary of 9/11, the Afghanistan debacle has evoked memories of Cambodia and Vietnam 1975 or Iran 1979, where the departing American

ambassador announced somewhat bitterly: "Till yesterday, we were ruling this country!"

Afghanistan is much more than an intelligence failure or an error of policy judgment.

It has turned out as the nemesis of the US policy of 'regime change' in the Third World, which the US attempted 72 times during the Cold War, 1945-1989.

Over 75 years ago, when the US emerged as the victor of WWII, it was heralded as the harbinger of the 'American Century'. This view was reinforced when the Afghan War against the Soviet Union sparked the collapse of the USSR and the collapse of Communism in Eastern Europe, symbolised by the demolition of the Berlin Wall. The sole superpower's President, George HW Bush, triumphantly proclaimed in 1991: "What we say goes!"

That was 30 years ago. Today, the image, clout and confidence of the sole superpower lies buried in the debris of the destruction of the war in Afghanistan, which has lived up to its reputation as 'the graveyard of empires', devouring the American superpower, as it did earlier with Britain and Soviet Union – the superpowers of the 19th and 20th centuries.

*The writer is member Senate Of Pakistan*

# Taliban's Challenge

*Willingly or otherwise, the world has entrusted Afghanistan to the Taliban, but are they worthy of the trust?*



By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The jury is still out on whether to call the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan a new dawn of hope or the onset of a nightmare. Should we call it "the Fall of Kabul"? Or will "the Liberation of Afghanistan" depict the spirit of the historical event better? It will be some time before we get the answers to these questions.

Ultimately, the answers remain in the hands of the Taliban.

The fall of Kabul to the Taliban on 15 August 2021 bewildered the world with palpable and widespread despondency, particularly in the West. The accusations are still flying left and right with no understanding of the unfolding events or their underlying dynamics, and not even a vague perception of what the future holds.

Back in the United States, President Joe Biden is weathering a firestorm of scathing criticism for his unilateral decision to withdraw forces from Afghanistan, without any consultation with allies.

Former President Donald Trump had the cheek to term the decision as 'humiliating' although in-fact it was he who struck a deal based on a cut-and-run policy with the Taliban, setting the stage for what we have seen in Afghanistan.

President Joe Biden stands firm and unapologetic in the face of all criticism. He is adamant that his decision to go along with Trump's Doha deal is final, and he is not going to hand over this generational war to the fifth president of the United States of America.

His statement could mean Biden is content to be a one-time president. On the other hand, the fact remains that if you look through the haze created by allegations and counter-allegations, the withdrawal from Afghanistan enjoys bipartisan support in the USA.

The reason for this consensus is a realisation on the part of American nation that it has bled enough pursuing a policy of

starting and engaging in unnecessary, bloody, and destructive wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan – and that if continued, this policy can jeopardise the future of America in the face of an ascendant China.

In other words, the choice was between building and bleeding America, and the collective wisdom of the Americans has chosen building over bleeding. The Afghan war was a haemorrhaging wound that needed to be plugged and healed.

The decision reflects a strategic realisation by the US policy elite that American hegemony over the world is under threat. What is more, these wars (and particularly the Afghan war) were fought with borrowed money, strapping generations of Americans with debt.

There is an urgent sense prevalent in the US that if America is to stem its relative decline, it must cut waste and focus on building its economy and reserves. To begin that journey, termination of the Afghan war was an absolute must.



However, the US will maintain a presence in the region by employing far less resources than required by a trillion-dollar war.

The UK and the European Union are fuming that President Biden has not consulted allies and rightly so as they were in it together. The most likely reason for President Biden not to consult the allies was the apprehension that any consultation could result in long drawn out discussion, delaying the decision, which the US did not want. The US needed a clean break.

This fiasco has raised serious questions about the bankability of an increasingly introverted US for the security of its allies. President Macron contends that the US is no more a reliable partner to defend the EU and that EU should take its full responsibility to defend itself against Russia and China.

This idea was seeded when President Obama oversaw a significant shift towards Asia, and gained traction during the Trump era. There is every reason to believe it would be further strengthened following the recent events in Afghanistan.

The European Union is rich in human and material resources, rich enough to build an effective security apparatus. If that happens, it may be good not only for the Europe but also for the world at large,

making it multipolar. It could open new vistas for international cooperation and conflicts, and the world may look very different in coming years.

The UK is in a very peculiar situation though. Since World War II, the UK has had a special relationship with the US though in practice it means toeing the American line, with few significant exceptions, in foreign affairs of which participation of the UK in recent wars in the Middle East and Afghanistan is a testimony.

This is why Biden's unilateral pull-out from Afghanistan has infuriated the conservatives. The language they used in the parliamentary debate about America is unheard of before from them. Those hot words reflect their cold fear that the UK has been left high and dry in the wake of Brexit.

The UK has estranged the liberal democracies on its doorstep and the US did not bother to even inform it about its withdrawal plan. That seemingly leaves the UK standing alone in the international affairs. The statement of Prime Minister Boris Johnson about the futility of keeping the Afghan mission going without America reflects the helplessness of the UK in particular and the West in general.

The poignant scenes from the Kabul airport

have seared into the minds and emotions of the public. It is heartrending to see mothers handing babies away to strangers hoping they would be brought up to in a strange culture and knowing they may not be able to see them again.

The desperate attempts by people to leave the country by clinging to the planes and then dropping to their deaths have left scars on the peoples' mind and the same is true for the scrambling multitude of crowds outside the Kabul airport to get inside the airport and ultimately to head off to a safe haven in some western country.

Such desperate scenes have been blamed on President Joe Biden's decision, but such a blame is not totally justified. No matter when the withdrawal happened, these scenes were inevitable. If it was not August, it could have been October or November or some other month. There was no escape to this predicament.

Some analyst advocating planned evacuation are wrong in assuming that it would have avoided such scenes. Once you start the process of evacuation, the stampede is bound to happen. It will not happen only if you assume that people do not know or understand what is happening and what is coming their way. To make such an assumption would be sheer folly.



One needs to remember that withdrawal is on schedule agreed upon a long time ago. What was not envisaged was the sudden demise of the Afghan government. The whole country was handed over to the Taliban without any fight.

Despite Taliban's assurances that they would not enter Kabul without agreeing to some sort of political set up, the Afghan government abandoned the city. The speed at which the Afghan government fell was astonishing but there was nothing astonishing in its fall.

Western intelligence sources reckoned that it would not survive more than few months or may be a year after the withdrawal of foreign troops. The Afghan government fall was inevitable.

If this is true, then one should not be surprised to see the Afghan government and Afghan army to dissolve so quickly and abruptly. This was the best course of action they could have adopted to save their skin and save the nation from further destruction and bloodshed.

They achieved a peaceful transfer of power by entering into agreements with the Taliban in various districts and provinces. The Taliban's general amnesty sprang from, among many other factors, such agreements. It was just logical.

In fact, the Taliban wrong-footed the western analysts and policymakers by announcing such steps and behaving in a way what was not expected of them.

The way forward for Afghanistan is that the Taliban stick to their announcements in letter and spirit. They have a golden opportunity to unite the nation and work for the well-being and welfare of the common Afghan citizen.

If they behave and agree to an inclusive set up, they are in for a long haul. If they squander this opportunity, they will not be forgiven by history and their so-called glorious victory will be remembered as one of the darkest moments of Afghan history.

The people who are taking withdrawal of American and NATO troops from Afghanistan as a defeat for the West and victory for the Taliban are delusional. The US and the West achieved many of their goals a long time ago. In fact they should have left back

then because ultimately, they had to leave, if not today then tomorrow.

What they did not achieve was the success of their client regime, a political disposition embodying their view of what kind of a system of the government and state institutions Afghanistan should have. President Biden claims they never intended it. Taliban's success is against the Afghan government which melted away without facing them.

The US and the West might have not been able to bring about reforms in Afghanistan through their supporters, but it seems they have been able to mould the Afghan Taliban in such a way that will be much more beneficial to Afghanistan and Afghan society and that too on a permanent footing.

This is likely to be a long-lasting effect of this war and if it is, then despite the heavy cost the Afghans bore of this war, it has achieved something which has never been achieved in Afghan history before: reformed Afghans.



If the US wants to safeguard its interests in the area and wants Afghanistan and the region to flourish, then it must engage the Taliban rather than forsaking them. Regional and international engagements can be used to continually encourage and pressure the Taliban to follow the path of moderation and hold on to their promises and pronouncements. Any other scenario could be a nightmare for all concerned. This opportunity must not go to waste.

Pakistan needs to play its part in bringing lasting peace and prosperity, to Afghanistan and to the region, by encouraging Afghan groups to sit round the table and work for a genuine all-inclusive government. But they must maintain absolute

neutrality at all times.

Pakistan can also encourage all the Afghanistan's neighbouring countries – including China, Russia, and the Central Asian Republics – to make a regional policy for the benefit of Afghanistan and the region.

Washington needs to be engaged, as do all other western capitals, for rebuilding Afghanistan and keeping the Taliban to hold to their promises and newly found enlightenment.

Pakistan's Arab and Middle Eastern friends can play a significant role and Islamabad needs to coordinate with them. Being non-partisan does not mean doing nothing. Pakistan must safeguard its interests.

Taliban must remember that Islam was, is and will continue to be a liberating force for all the oppressed sections of the society be it women, children, or minorities. Liberating the oppressed is one of the fundamental precepts of Islam. Anything oppressive is un-Islamic.

Equally important, any attempt to oppress the masses people is doomed to fail. Let the people of Afghan breathe the air of freedom and tranquillity. Deliberately or otherwise, the world has entrusted Afghanistan to the Taliban. To prove they are worthy of the trust is up to them.

They must work hard to earn internal and external legitimacy or Afghanistan will become be pariah state. Afghanistan as a state will face many challenges for which the Taliban will need the help of the outside world. Without it, Afghanistan may descend again in a protracted civil war and may not survive as a state we know it.



# On Tenterhooks over Afghan Situation

*With bated breath, Pakistan waits for the Taliban's next move before taking a formal position.*



By Khalid Wasim

India has fenced our eastern border. We have fenced our western border. There is a sea in the south and high mountains in the north.

These were the words uttered by Parliamentary Leader of the main opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and former foreign minister Khawaja Asif while speaking on the floor of the National Assembly during a sitting well before the terrorist attacks on the Chinese interests in Dasu and Gwadar and the Taliban take-over of Kabul.

Nobody gave importance to these words because they had come from an opposition member, but the latest developments in Afghanistan have not only uncovered Pakistan's directionless foreign policy, it has also exposed the country's extreme polarisation and disharmony, with liberal and religious sections divided for and against the new leadership in Afghanistan.

When the government has adopted a wait-and-see policy, and perhaps rightly so, the opposition parties are also showing extreme cautious in coming up with their clear stance over the recent developments taking place in the western neighbourhood.

The main opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) initially said it would not give a formal response over the situation in Afghanistan till the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government comes up with a clear-cut policy, but then on 25 August came out with a response similar to the position taken the government.

After a consultative meeting which was presided over by party's supreme and self-exiled leader Nawaz Sharif via video link from London, the PML-N issued a statement welcoming the dialogue process in Kabul between Taliban and other stakeholders, and hoping that this dialogue will result in the formation of a broad-based government in Afghanistan.

The statement says the PML-N respects the sovereignty of the Afghanistan and the Afghan people's right to determine their political future free from any foreign interference and anticipates that the sovereignty of the people and the state of Pakistan shall also be respected reciprocally.

PML-N expressed strong dismay that whereas the global community is actively engaged in deliberating the Afghanistan issue to evolve their own

national policies in this regard, the PTI government's only priority is political victimisation and persecution of the opposition while the Parliament remains under lock and key.

Similarly, the other opposition Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) has merely expressed its concerns over the developing situation in the war-torn Afghanistan and asked the government to take the Parliament on board before making any decision regarding the new regime under Taliban.

On the other hand, without waiting for Pakistan to take an official position, the religious parties have started hailing and celebrating the Taliban's "victory".

Only a day after Taliban's entry to Kabul on August 15 and without making any effort to reach out other parties despite being a part of the opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM), Chief of his own faction of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) Maulana Fazlur Rehman reportedly wrote a letter to Taliban leader Moulvi Haibatullah and "congratulated" him over the "historic victory", stating that the 'Mujahidin' had liberated their country through



their struggle against the foreign invaders and their agents.

The Maulana reportedly wished the Taliban success and offered them every possible support on behalf of his party.

Similarly, a joyous Jamaat-i-Islami chief Sirajul Haq through a statement while felicitating the Taliban, termed the “defeat of the American imperialist force” a landmark victory for the entire Ummah.

Also, the head of the JUI-S Maulana Hamidul Haq held a news conference in Peshawar on the very next day of the fall of Kabul and welcomed the development, stating that only enemies of peace would oppose the Taliban government.



Despite being together against the PTI regime in the country, the nationalist and religious parties have now come face-to-face as reacting to the JUI-F’s act of felicitating Taliban, Awami National Party (ANP) central secretary general Mian Iftikhar Hussain alleged that Maulana Fazlur Rehman had the blood of hundreds of thousands of Pakhtuns on his hands.

The ANP leader who had lost his only son in a terrorist attack and whose party remained the target of terrorism from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) reportedly claimed that the JUI-F was supporting the Afghan Taliban at the behest of the “establishment.”

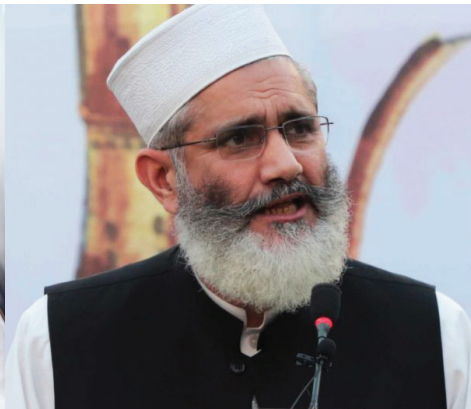
The opposition parties are urging the government to convene a joint session of the Parliament, which is already due after completion of the third parliamentary year. They are making this demand despite knowing well the reason as to why the government is not doing so.

Perhaps the government is doing so rightly

because of a number of reasons. Firstly, it knows that in Pakistan, there has been no tradition of making a policy through a parliamentary debate. Secondly, it fears a strong backlash of its decision, whatever it turns out to be.

The country’s military and intelligence leaders while anticipating the imminent emergence of Taliban after the decision of the US administration to withdraw from Afghanistan had already advised the political leaders to avoid “divisive politics” on issues of national interest.

During an in-camera briefing to the parliamentary leaders on 1 July, Army Chief Gen Qamar Javed Bajwa and Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) Director General Lt-Gen Faiz Hameed had already cautioned about



the strategic challenges and related policy shift in external relations as repercussions for the country in the aftermath of the withdrawal of US-led international forces from Afghanistan.

The convening of the meeting of the National Security Committee (NSC) on the very next day of the fall of Kabul has so far been the only major activity on the part of the government to discuss the possible options available to the country, which is already facing international isolation.

And after the NSC meeting presided over by Prime Minister Imran Khan, it emerged that Pakistan will not take unilateral decision regarding Afghanistan and its future government as Islamabad will stand by the decision of the world community. National Security Adviser (NSA) Dr Moeed Yousuf has categorically declared that Pakistan is standing with the world community and will stand by whatever decision the international community takes.

Separately, Special Representative for Afghanistan Mohammad Sadiq reiterated the same policy, as did the federal cabinet in its meeting on 17 August, saying that Pakistan will take a decision after consultations with regional and international powers, especially China, Turkey, and the US.

Those having anti-Taliban sentiments in Pakistan are content so far with the government’s cautious approach – in contrast with the hasty recognition of the Taliban government when they took over Kabul in the 1990s.

However, the liberals have a feeling the PTI government has a soft corner for the



Taliban and is willing to recognise the new regime in Afghanistan. Their feelings got some justification when the NSC called the Taliban takeover a “logical conclusion to the conflict”.

On the other hand, the pro-Taliban segments of society are of the view that the establishment has still not completely come out of the US orbit and are waiting for Washington’s lead before making the decision.

Officially, Pakistan is urging all stakeholders in the neighbouring country to reach a political settlement, respect rule of law, protect human rights, and ensure that Afghan soil is not used by any terrorist organisation or group against any country.

Pakistan has also reaffirmed it would “continue to work with the international community and all Afghan stakeholders to facilitate an inclusive political settlement” for the representation of all Afghan ethnic groups.



An official press release issued by the Prime Minister's Office after the NSC meeting said the participants had emphasised that Pakistan remained committed to an inclusive political settlement in Afghanistan decided that the principle of "non-interference in Afghanistan" must be adhered to.

The NSC emphasized that the international community "must recognise the sacrifices made by Pakistan" over the last four decades, reminding the world that Pakistan, having suffered from the fallout of the Afghan conflict, was keen on peace and stability in the region.

to deal with possible consequences the nation can face after the establishment of Taliban rule in the war-torn country.

Acting swiftly, the PPP convened an extraordinary meeting of its Central Executive Committee (CEC) at Bilawal House in Karachi on 16 August to discuss the situation in Afghanistan and formulate the party's point of view on it.

In a brief statement issued after the hours-long meeting, the party came out with a call for a democratic, inclusive and pluralistic Afghanistan while showing concerns over the situation in the neighbouring country.

chairman said.

The PPP chairman also called for a strong action against militant organisations, stating: "The Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan and other terror organisations need to get a clear message that no such activity would be tolerated here in our country."

Accusing the Prime Minister of having a tendency to "appease terrorists", he said Pakistan could not afford to have any "confusion on terrorism" and required clarity on "political thought and policy" in the wake of the situation in Afghanistan.

In July, well before the Taliban takeover of



Pakistan, however, has played a major and appreciable role in the evacuation of its own and foreign citizens, diplomats, journalists, and staff of international organisations operating in Afghanistan who ran for the exits after Kabul fell to the Taliban.

A special inter-ministerial cell has been established in the Ministry of Interior to facilitate visa and arrival matters for personnel of foreign missions and officials of the United Nations agencies, international organisations, media, and others.

According to the government officials, Pakistan has already issued more than 300 visas to the journalist community only, for which the Committee to Protect Journalists has expressed gratitude to Pakistan.

The PML-N and the PPP are urging the government to come up with a policy statement and develop a national consensus

It sounded worry over the implication of the developing situation in Afghanistan, mainly for women, men, youth, and other vulnerable communities of Afghanistan.

A day after the party's CEC meeting, PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari came up with details of the discussion held under his chairmanship where the leaders including two former prime ministers — Yousuf Raza Gillani and Raja Pervez Ashraf — gave their inputs and suggestions to help devise the formal stance of the past ruling party in the Sindh province of Pakistan.

"It's time to engage parliament over our foreign policy. We also expect that a number of resolutions which were passed by parliament should guide us to devise the strategy. So, we also demand the government that resolutions on our policy should be followed at this crucial hour", the PPP

Kabul, the PPP chairman had stated that his party was preparing for and devising policies for Sindh, particularly Karachi, to deal with any "blowback" from the Afghan situation.

The present regional situation has put the already struggling Imran Khan-led coalition government to a real test. For some optimist political analysts, the recent developments in Afghanistan have created an opportunity for Pakistan to end its international isolation.

For this, however, the government will have to make some bold decisions and prepare a contingency plan to handle any adverse reaction from the extremist and radical forces.

# Shahbaz or Maryam



By Ahmad Waleed

The largest political party – Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) – is at a historic crossroads. The confusion is who is going to lead the party? Shahbaz Sharif or Maryam Nawaz? Both belong to the same family but, have different narratives. The party leaders and workers are facing a dilemma – who is the real in-charge? Are they playing a good cop, bad cop game? The final decision rests with the patron in-chief, Nawaz Sharif as the power rests with him since there is no major revolt within the party in sight.

The appeasement group believes the party supremo will have to vest all the powers to Shahbaz Sharif to make key party decisions in view of the next general election in 2023, while the hawks think the Nawaz Sharif narrative played a tremendous role in the revival of the party after the Panama scandal had rocked the PML-N resulting in the ouster of their leader Nawaz Sharif from power.

For the last three decades the younger brother had shown no sign of disobeying his elder brother and at the same time he remained steadfast in his pro-establishment stance. And he shows no reluctance in accepting it. Shahbaz Sharif has openly said he had received many coveted offers on some occasions, but he refused as he could never think of ditching his elder brother. He is in favour of ‘grand national’ dialogue for

the good of the country. However, it is not sure if his proposal has been welcomed by the powers who call the shots.

There is yet another dilemma. The hawks question what’s the guarantee that the idea of abandoning the pro-establishment narrative will bring the PML-N back to power? “It will definitely damage the party vote bank though,” one of the party leaders said. On the other hand, the appeasement group members, who are in majority now, believe the hawkish stance will not help the party return to power even if they win elections. So, the problem remains.

Serious deliberations are under way in the party ranks to reach a conclusion that is acceptable to both the groups. There is, however, a consensus among some of the party members that the PML-N supremo has been sent into exile for good and he will never be allowed to return home until the country goes through a major political upheaval that forces the establishment to go full circle. Many think it’s not going to happen anytime soon. So, the lines have been drawn, at least for now. In this scenario, Shahbaz Sharif stands a good chance to strike a deal with the power corridors.

Maryam Nawaz could be the new party head since she is following in her father’s footsteps and she carries on his legacy. But, has she achieved that status where she could independently manage the party

affairs, especially with regards to devising election strategy? The recent debacle in Sialkot and AJK elections tell a different story, according to some senior politicians of the party. They think Maryam has a long way to go.

Shahbaz Sharif is the party head. But, he has to look towards his elder brother before making key political decisions. It shows that the final authority lies with Nawaz Sharif. Will Shahbaz be able to break free from the shackles of his family control? Has the time come or his elder brother in exile will continue to exert his pressure on the political matters of the party?

Nevertheless, the party has to come out of this uncertain situation sooner rather than later. The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) government is all out to enter into the pre-election mode by hinting at holding local bodies elections within six months. Hefty allocations for development projects in the Budget 2021-22 through the members of the national and provincial assemblies where PTI is in power reflect the signs that the government has started to target the 2023 elections. “We will have to decide without delay if what narrative we will have adopt not only to win the next elections rather to come to power. If we miss the train of 2023 elections, the party may slide into oblivion,” a senior PML-N member fears.



# Despite Lapses, PTI has much to boast of

*Where will the PTI government leave the nation in 2023 – in Naya Pakistan or where it found the country in 2018?*



By Zain Rihat

In its third year in power, tough times for the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government seem to be over. The party is quite comfortable now as compared to the previous two years when it comes to development, good governance, and public service.

The PTI came into power carrying the heavy burden of its pro-people slogans and promises. It remained under pressure from the opposition and the masses for not fulfilling the promises made during the election campaign of 2018.

The first two years were marked by shaky governance coupled with ill-planned decisions and frequent policy reversals. The poor growth of the economy led the government to replace the team midway. On the domestic front, governance problems led to the issues such as price hikes that remain the most irritating subject for the government.

The PTI government has gained strength in its third year in power. It succeeded in getting the budget passed. There was a danger of the budget being blocked in the centre or in Punjab. The Jehangir Tareen factor has been all but neutralized.

Prime Minister Imran Khan and Chief Minister Usman Buzdar remained successful in allaying the concerns of the allies. The pressure on the government has eased

though the issues concerning the public directly such as inflation and increasing utility bills are yet to be addressed.

The campaign against the Usman Buzdar government continued for almost three years from different quarters and sometimes from unknown quarters but he remains safe for now. The PML-N is not clear whether it wants an in-house change in Punjab or let the Buzdar government limp its way to 2023. The PML-Q is not planning to march out of the coalition any time soon.

The establishment also seems in no mood to act against the PTI governments. Though the PML-N is also manoeuvring for space on the chessboard, the PTI government has gained confidence since it won the AJK elections. All these developments suggest that the PTI is moving with full ease. The PTI government has another two years to improve its acceptability among the masses by improving governance, controlling inflation, and taking pro-people decisions.

Anyhow, as the government has entered into the fourth year of its mandated tenure, the Imran-led government has a mixed scorecard. It may have lapses yet it has much to boast of. On the domestic front, the government gained success by launching several initiatives for overseas Pakistanis, farmers, industrialists, and businessmen.

The Balakot incident and Pakistan's mature

response to Indian aggression was perhaps Prime Minister Imran Khan's best hour. The government earned pride by negotiating with the foreign governments for the return of Pakistani prisoners completing term in foreign jails.

On two fronts, the PTI government can claim due credit: The successful handling of Covid-19 and disbursement of cash to the poor masses under Ehsaas programme. After Hong Kong and New Zealand, Pakistan ranked third in the world in fighting the virus. The NCOC has been a success story and if such efficiency can be replicated in other areas of governance, the PTI could certainly improve its performance in its fourth year.

Coming to the successes of the PTI government so far, it can be safely said that overseas Pakistanis remain a priority for the government. Efforts for the right to vote to overseas are still underway despite resistance from the opposition parties. Agriculture, construction of dams, South Punjab initiative, work on climate change, 10 Billion Tree Tsunami, Clean, Green Pakistan, Universal health coverage, education, and Kamyab Jawan Programme can be termed as successes of the PTI government.

For the first time in the history of the country after the Ayub era, work on 10 big and medium sized dams is in progress. If

completed in a ten years' time, it would be a different Pakistan altogether. The government has taken lead in facilitating the farmers and they are getting the maximum of their produce with no exploitation at all. Never in these years has the farmers suffered losses due to lesser rates in the market.

Given below is a quick overview of the government's key success stories.

## Overseas Pakistanis

During his election campaign, Imran Khan had vowed to ensure voting rights for overseas Pakistanis and developing financial instruments that create attractive investment opportunities for them. The ruling party, meanwhile, has also been pushing for the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs). Despite work done, the promise, however, is yet to be fulfilled, largely due to the hesitance of the opposition parties to include overseas Pakistan in the electoral rolls.

## Digital incentives

In order to attract investment from overseas Pakistanis, the PTI government has introduced a number of projects that focus specifically on this promise. On 31 January 2019, the PM launched the Pakistan Banao Certificate — a dollar-denominated diaspora bond aimed at attracting investment from overseas Pakistanis to help strengthen the national economy.

In September last year, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) launched the Roshan Digital Account (RDA) for non-resident Pakistanis to enable them to remotely open bank accounts in the country through online digital branches without physically visiting banks. Facilitating overseas Pakistanis, PM Khan's government also provided incentives such as tax exemptions and simplified biometric verification. Investments in property, tourism and the construction sector were also encouraged.

## South Punjab

One of the ruling party's promises before forming the government was creation of a South Punjab province on administrative lines. In 2018, the party set up the Executive Council on Creation of South Punjab province and formed a committee to develop political consensus over the creation of the new province.

## Climate change

Unfortunately Pakistan is among the ten countries worst hit by climate change and global warming would have a harmful impact on the generations to come if the current trends are not reversed. The government is utilising its best efforts to slow down and reverse the harmful impacts of climate change.

## 10 Billion Tree Tsunami

One of the hallmark projects of the PTI government over the past three years has been the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami. The scheme was expanded from the Billion Tree Tsunami project launched in KP in 2015. Under the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami, seasonal plantation drives have been held in various parts of the country, with the target to plant 10 billion saplings by 2023.

## Clean & Green Pakistan

Alongside the 10 Billion Tree Tsunami, the government also initiated the Clean Green Pakistan drive to tackle the challenges of rising pollution and global warming. In November 2019, the Clean Green Pakistan Index was launched, under which 19 cities will compete on certain issues of public interest in the initial stage. With considerable work done to launch the programme in many parts of the country, the promise can be termed as partially complete.

## Poverty Alleviation

The PTI government has initiated a poverty alleviation drive across the country. It has launched special drives to improve access to sanitation and potable water, besides increasing funding for the most impoverished districts through poverty alleviation plans, provide Sehat Insaf Cards to residents and augment the existing Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP). In June 2020, the government decided to increase the monthly stipend given to poor families registered with the BISP from PKR 2,000 to PKR 3,000.

## Building a welfare state

Alongside the BISP, the federal government has worked on various other projects under the Ehsaas programme, which the PM has said will turn Pakistan into a welfare state. In a report, the World Bank has listed the Ehsaas Emergency Cash programme among the top four social protection interventions

globally in terms of the number of people covered. The programme distributed cash among 15 million underprivileged families after they suffered financially due to Covid-19 related lockdowns.

## Universal health coverage

In an expansion of a health insurance scheme first launched by the KP government, the federal government expanded the Sehat Sahulat Programme at the national level. In February 2019, Prime Minister Imran launched the nationwide Sehat Insaf Card, which aims to provide free medical treatment to approximately 80 million people. Perhaps the biggest highlight of the project came when the prime minister, on 28 October 2020, said universal health coverage would be offered to everyone in Punjab and KP within a year.

## Education

Prime Minister Imran Khan recently launched a uniform curriculum to end the class-based system in the education sector of Pakistan. Speaking as the chief guest at the inauguration ceremony in the federal capital, the PM said that the single curriculum program is to improve the education standard besides ending class divisions in the country.

In line with the government's vision of providing equal development opportunities to every citizen, a uniform curriculum would be an important milestone in bridging class gaps. The uniform curriculum has been developed in consultation and collaboration with education departments of all federating units of the country.

Kamyab Jawan and Hunarmand Jawan programmes

The PTI government launched the Kamyab Jawan Programme (KJP) in October 2019. It is an aggressive small-and-medium-enterprise lending scheme, aimed at stimulating job creation and economically empowering the youth.

Another project launched by the PTI government is the Hunarmand Jawan Programme aimed at the economic emancipation of the youth by providing them quality training. Launching the project on Jan 9, 2020, the PM said that the project would see the training of 500,000 youth.





# **MATRACON PAKISTAN PVT.LTD**

## **BUILDING WITH TRUST**

### **SINCE 1985**



Phone: +92-51-2215266, +92-51-2101183



Address: 60-A, Street 39, Nazim-ud-din Road, F-10/4, Islamabad



Website: <https://www.matraconpakistan.com.pk>

# Delta Variant Blamed for Mortality Surge Among the Unvaxxed

*The Delta variant of Covid-19, still the dominant strain in Pakistan, is linked with a surge in deaths, almost entirely among the unvaccinated.*

By Noor Aftab

With the Delta variant wreaking havoc as the dominant strain of the deadly Covid-19 virus in Pakistan, the number of active cases reached 92,244 on 25 August, exceeding 90,000 for the first time since the peak of third-wave earlier this year.

As many as 141 patients lost their battle for life on that day, touching the highest tally of deaths in a day in almost four months. The surge is being ascribed to increased mortality from Delta variant seen almost entirely among unvaccinated people, adding new urgency to the task of accelerating vaccination.

## Vaccination

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) – the nerve centre of the country's fight against Covid-19 pandemic has informed that The government has managed to administer a total of 49,883,211 doses of coronavirus vaccine. All the vaccination centres are fully functional and there is no shortage of coronavirus vaccine in the country.

## Threatening situation

The health experts are of the view that there is no immediate relief in sight and the fight against fourth wave of the pandemic would continue unless the positivity rate decreases to a satisfactory level. The twin cities of Rawalpindi and Islamabad are witnessing rising number of cases and the situation is critical in Chitral where infection rate has risen to 17. The overall positivity rate is 7.4 but the coronavirus disease is hitting the major cities having high density of population, which is a matter of grave concern for all the stakeholders.

## Tougher restrictions

The federal government has announced that a single dose vaccination is necessary for travelling on highways and motorways after September 15 while after October 15, no one would be allowed to use the motorway without vaccination. The vaccination has been made mandatory for air travel after September 30 while those working in transportation of educational institutions must take their doses before the date. The unvaccinated people have been barred to enter shopping malls from

August 31. From September 30, only those people having taken their both jabs will be allowed to enter shopping malls. Only those people who have taken one jab are allowed to enter hotels from August 31 while complete vaccination will be mandatory for entry from September 30.

## Mobile vaccination service

The Punjab government has started utilizing mobile units to deliver Covid-19 vaccines to the people. Senior citizens who are 80 years and above and those with disabilities over 50 years of age are already receiving service at their doorstep.

## Booster dose

The government is considering initiating booster after six months of second shot to above 50-year frontline healthcare workers and it is likely to start from October 1. The second category under consideration for a booster shot is fully vaccinated immunocompromised people and if permitted, they could get the booster jab six months after their complete vaccination. But the officials have also clarified that booster dose would not be available for general public because the government is currently focusing on giving first and second dose to the people.

## Young population

The government will soon start vaccination for the age group of 15 to 16 years. The immunocompromised citizens of the age of 12 years and above would get special recommended Covid-19 vaccine at the mega vaccination centres.

## Fake vaccination certificates

As the Covid-19 delta variant spreads and the pandemic shows no signs of slowing down, some people are now having an easier time getting around restrictions related to vaccination status—by purchasing fake vaccine cards online. The fake vaccination certificates are being offered on at least two online websites in Pakistan. According to the information posted on these websites, the applicant should transfer Rs. 8,000 to a specific account number and fake vaccination certificate would be sent to him two hours after receiving the

money. The government has developed an app to help people and officials identify fake coronavirus vaccination certificates. The app, named Pak Covid-19 Vaccination Pass App, can instantly confirm whether an inoculation certificate is genuine or fake.

## More doses

Pakistan has received 3.7 million more doses of Pfizer vaccine from the United States and a plan is under way to vaccinate as many people as possible in next four months. Punjab Health Minister Dr. Yasmin Rashid said they have set the target to vaccinate forty percent of population of Lahore in near future. Currently, there is no shortage of coronavirus vaccine anywhere in the country. The limitations and gaps sometimes create problems as we had seen in the recent past when shortage of vaccine hit major cities in the country.

## Non-implementation of SOPs

There is not a single town, city or province in Pakistan where the people are following the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) introduced by the government. Unfortunately, the federal and provincial governments think it advisable to pay only lip service and avoid taking any serious action against shopkeepers and visitors who are ignoring their directives in the face of ongoing fourth wave of pandemic.

## A regular threat

The coronavirus is a reality and it will stay for quite some time but vaccination is the only solution to this threatening disease.

We know that low literacy rate and general lack of awareness initially led to non-seriousness of people towards the adoption of social distancing, wearing facemask and hand hygiene. The high population density in major cities of Pakistan also facilitated in the spread of virus.

The ongoing situation underlines the need that the government should continue to follow three-pronged approach of trace, test, and treat that would help prevent the community transmission and save lives of the people.



# Christianity Under Roman Influence

*Constantine's embrace of Christianity would leave lasting, transformative impressions on both Rome and Christianity.*



By Azmat Mumtaz Saqib

**T**he fortunes of Christianity under Romans took a turn for the better under Emperor Constantine, who looked upon the persecuted Christians with kindness. The first recorded Christmas celebration took place in 336 CE replacing the festival of Roman Sun God Sol Invictus, which was held on 25 December every year. The following year, the Emperor converted to Christianity on his deathbed.

While he lived, Emperor Constantine supported the church financially, built various basilicas, granted privileges to clergy, promoted Christians to high offices and returned their confiscated property. He presided over the first council of Nicaea, which adopted Trinity as the only valid doctrine.

Later on, Western European Christianity developed under Greek influence and Eastern European under Jewish influence, Northern Europe became Non-Trinitarian, and Southern European states adopted Trinity.

In the 4th century, the doctrine of Arianism became prevalent, which

taught that Christ is distinct from and subordinate to God the father. Arian Christianity became a firmly established faith among Germanic tribes. Later, Arianism was declared heresy and Nicene creed declared Trinity as the only valid creed.

In 380 CE, the Roman Empire officially adopted Trinitarian Christianity as its state religion. The Church adopted the same organizational boundaries as the Empire: geographical provinces, called dioceses, corresponded to imperial government territorial divisions. The bishops were located in urban centers but oversaw dioceses. Five seats (or see) rose to eminence: Rome, Constantinople, Jerusalem, Antioch, and Alexandria.

The Nestorian Schism (431 CE) was the split between the Christian churches of Sassanid Persia, affiliated with Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, and the churches that rejected him. Nestorius and his doctrine emphasized the radical distinctness between Christ's human and divine natures.

Later on the state church of Roman Empire rejected and persecuted them and thus church of the East was created in Sassanid Persia.

During the early Middle Ages (476-799 CE) Roman popes while maintaining nominal loyalty to the Emperor in Constantinople, also maintained relationship with the rising barbarian rulers of the former Roman provinces. Foederati and Germanic Kingdoms rose to dominate those territories. Foederati were barbarian tribes bound by a treaty with Rome, to which the Empire provided benefits in exchange for military assistance.

Missionaries from Roman Britain Spread Christianity into the Celtic areas (Scotland, Ireland and Wales.). Anglo-Saxon tribes also embraced Christianity and newly converted missionaries converted their Saxon relatives in Germania.

In the 5th century, the largely Christian Gallo-Roman inhabitants of Gaul (modern France) were overrun by the Franks and faced persecution. But in 496 CE, King Clovis I converted from

paganism to Roman Catholicism and urged his fellow nobles to follow suit.

Under the Frankish kingdom, Western Church increased its missionary activities. During late 8th century, King Charlemagne of France resorted to mass killings to subjugate Saxons and compelled them to accept Christianity. Under his reign and later his son's, France experienced a period of renaissance introducing intellectual and cultural revival of literature, arts, and scriptural studies lasting till the 9th century.

Religious tensions between the Eastern and Western regions under Christianity surfaced even in 4th century. Differences arose on i) nature of the primacy of the Bishop of Rome and ii) theological implications of adding the clause "Filioque" (and from the Son) to the Nicene creed in 1014 CE.

Schisms have occurred for a variety of reasons, but mainly due to certain decisions made by general councils not reaching a consensus on disputes of the time. This happened between Byzantine East and Roman West in the early Middle Ages.

In 1054, the bishops of Rome and Constantinople engaged in a mutual excommunication because of the theological differences and the refusal of Constantinople to accept Roman claims of primacy. These were erased from memory and the midst of the Church by pope John Paul VI and Patriarch of Constantinople in 1965.

In Roman Empire, before Christianity, spiritual and temporal authority rested in the emperor. Similarly, in Papal states, Pope's role was religious as well as political. In late seventh century, a very significant conflict arose between secular and religious powers, known as Investiture controversy.

It started with the dispute of authority to appoint bishops (normally for life) between Emperor Henry IV and Pope Gregory VII. Usually Emperors could exploit their handpicked bishops for Political gains in the regions, which was not acceptable to the popes.

Eventually Emperor Henry IV caved in and received absolution from the Pope after dramatic public penance. Similarly, King Henry I of England had to share power

with the Church in 1107 CE.

In Christian and European history, eleventh and twelve centuries were consumed by crusades, the campaigns in the Holy Land sponsored by the papacy against Muslim forces as well as warfare against Muslim forces in Southern Spain, Southern Italy, and Sicily. A third usage of crusades refers to the conversion and subjugation of pagan peoples of North Eastern Europe and a fourth meaning covers strife against the Pope's political enemies in Western Europe and against groups of heretics.



The First Crusade resulted in the conquest of Antioch in 1099 and then Jerusalem, which remained under Christian rule till 1187. The Second Crusade (1145 CE) occurred in failure when the Edessa region was retaken by Islamic forces.

The Third Crusade resulted in the famous battles between Richard the Lionheart and Saladin (Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi). The Fourth crusade also failed in 1202 CE when the crusaders could not retake the Holy Land.

In 1184, medieval Inquisition was another act of Catholic Rome, which impacted

European politico-religious scenario. Inquisition was a system of repressive means, some of temporal and some of spiritual kind, whose judgements were concurrently issued by religious and civil authorities to protect religious orthodoxy (against heresy) and social order. It was promulgated in response to movements of heresy and apostasy against Western Catholicism.

During the late Middle Ages (1300-1520 CE), Pope Gregory XI shifted to Avignon (France), but after his death another schism occurred within Catholic Church lasting from 1378 to 1417 CE, in which bishops residing in Rome and Avignon (France) both claimed to be the true popes.

Criticism of Church corruption started surfacing in thirteenth century. John Wycliffe, an English scholar and alleged heretic in 1378 began a systematic attack on the beliefs and practices of the Church. He denounced the corruption of the Church and became a precursor of Protestant Reformation.

Wycliffe further emphasized the supremacy of the Bible and called for a direct relationship with God, without interference of Priests and Bishops. Jan Hus, a Czech theologian in Prague also spoke out on similar lines.

European Renaissance also effected the city of Rome, the Papacy, and the Papal States. Besides being Head of the Church, the pope became one of Italy's important secular rulers, and the likes of Pope Julius II often waged campaigns to protect and expand the temporal domain of the papal authority.

Popes in competition with other Italian lords spent lavishly both on private luxuries as well as public works, building churches, bridges, and magnificent aqueducts in Rome. The Church also patronized great artists for architectural magnificence.

The church commissioned artists such as Michelangelo, Donatello, and Leonardo da Vinci etc. Payment of indulgences by common Christians were directed to build structures of lasting magnificence like St. Peters Basilica.



# The Rise of Islamophobia in the West

*It would seem there a dark spot in the heart of Western Liberalism reserved for Islam and the people of colour.*



By Mishaal Ashraf

The rise of islamophobia in the post-9-11 era continues to spiral upwards across the West, with no end in sight to the Muslim communities that have been integral to these countries for decades if not centuries.

On 6 June 2021, the Afzaal family went for a walk in London, Ontario. Little did the family members – Salman, Talat, Madiha, Yumna, and Fayeze – know that this would be the last time they were going out, for they had to pay a heavy price for having faith in Islam.

Upon investigating the case, police found out that the attack on the Afzaal family was intentional and was categorized as a hate crime. The attack left the Muslims residing in Canada bewildered and

petrified.

This is not the first time that Muslims in Canada have been targeted. Around a year ago, Ejaz Ahmed Choudary, a schizophrenic father, lost his life for being a Muslim in Canada at the hands of Ontario police.

Canada is not the only country where religion-based crime takes place. For example, France is home to the largest Muslim community in Western Europe. In 2020, 235 attacks on Muslims were reported, with a 53 percent increase from 2019. Most of these attacks took place in Paca, Rhône-Alpes, and Ile-de-France. Attacks on mosques also experienced a 35 percent increase from the previous year.

European far-right extremists have been targeting Muslims in particular, and French Muslims are suffering the most. Members of the French parliament have openly talked about their anti-Muslim and anti-Islam views, which has left the Muslim community fearful.

Emmanuel Macron is considered a liberal leader. Still, his liberalism has strong views against Muslims, making one wonder about his political ideology, which won him the election in the first place.

In October 2020, Macron's government announced an anti-separatism law, slamming massive restrictions on the Muslim community. With the announcement, Macron has become a figure of

hate in Muslim countries and is the cause behind many internal controversies.

Six percent of the French population is Muslim and having an anti-Muslim government in the residing country is devastating, to say the least.

Islamophobia gained popularity in the West after the 9/11 incident. The belief that Muslims are terrorists has created numbness in Canadians regarding civil rights breaches and otherwise. Media channels portray it as anti-Muslim sentiments, while political leaders deal it under international security, passing anti-terrorism laws.

Citizens of western countries descended from immigrants of colour have often been reported as being subjected to extra security checks and being questioned on their “Americanness,” “Canadian-ness,” “Frenchness,” etc. Brown Muslims are not only targeted by white supremacists but also by the government.

Angus Reid Institute conducted a study in 2017 to study religious discrimination. The results showed that Canadians did not have favourable views of Islam, Sikhism, and Hinduism. In addition, they rated the mentioned religions as being lower than Christianity, Judaism, and Buddhism, respectively.

Azeezah Khanji, a legal scholar, conducted another study that concluded that more than 50 percent of Canadians believed that they



could not trust Muslims. They thought that Muslim mosques should be under surveillance by the government. In addition, 46 percent of Canadians believe that Muslims face discrimination because of their own fault.

The use of Islam by terrorist organizations has defamed the religion and its followers. When white people commit crimes, they are seen and treated as individuals with access to all legal rights. However, when a Muslim commits a crime, they are seen as a product of their community and labelled as terrorists by the media and other state institutions.

Words like liberalism are thrown around in communities to get validated in social circles these days. However, what is forgotten is that liberalism entails accepting others just as they are. This means accepting their race, ethnicity, faith, sex, etc.

People of colour, be it brown or black, find themselves at the centre of conflicts more often than necessary, rarely because of their own wrongdoing. When members from marginalized communities commit crimes, the entire community or religion is held responsible for it.

The multicultural images displayed by western media hide the reality of what actually goes around. People are forced to believe that the West is home to mosaic nations, concealing harsh realities that take place in the form of racial, religious, and other forms of discrimination.

Global politics and societal beliefs, especially in Europe and the Americas, took a 180° shift post 9/11. The societal beliefs and multicultural discourse fell out of alignment as the words ‘Muslim’ and ‘terrorist’ became synonymous.

Biased media reporting and western politicians’ rhetoric are only adding fuel to the fire. Muslims are becoming victims of oppression all around the world. Voices of the radicalized are only heard once extreme acts of violence take place.

Islamophobia has become a burden that Muslims cannot carry anymore. Whether online or offline, hostility towards Muslims only shows how deeply rooted and problematic white supremacists’ perspectives are. Moreover, it completely negates the ideals of Western Liberalism when racial inequities take place on a daily basis.

To conclude with a quote from Abhijit Naskar: “Discriminations suit animals, not humans. And yet, the unfortunate reality is that humans discriminate against each other on the grounds of imaginary labels, not the animals. This way, animals are more civilized than humans.”



# The Mother of All Allotments

*Allotment of lucrative plots of land in Islamabad to the high and mighty – minus the 7th Common – has ruffled a few feathers.*



By Asadullah

A recent announcement of allotment through ballot of plots in two new sectors of Islamabad may well go down as the most controversial event in the history of Pakistan's young capital.

First, it sent the social media up in arms over what the netizens saw as rigged balloting, favouring the high and mighty. Then, another aspect of the matter attracted scrutiny by the Islamabad High Court (IHC). In the meantime, senior members of the bureaucracy complained they had been bumped off the list to accommodate junior but better connected civil servants.

On 17 August 2021, the Federal Government Employees Housing Authority (FGEHA) announced allotment of 4,723 plots of land among BS-16 to BS-22 officials of the federal government, judges of superior and subordinate judiciary, and lawyers, while the allotment of plots in these sectors to journalists is still awaited.

However, the allotment of plots to country's most powerful judges, a couple of special assistants to the prime minister, and influential bureaucrats created an uproar

after the stories published in the mainstream media and circulated in the social media.

The matter was also discussed in the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) where the FGEHA disclosed that it is considering of abolishing all the quota for plots except for the employees of the federal government for which the institution was established.

## The illustrious allottees

Among the recipients of the plots in F-14 and F-15 are about 50 judges of the superior courts including Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed, Justice Umar Ata Bandial, Justice Musheer Alam, Justice Qazi Mohammad Amin Ahmed, Justice Maqbool Baqir, Justice Mazhar Alam Khan Miankhel, Justice Sardar Tariq Masood, Justice Aminud Din Khan, Justice Ijazul Ahsan, and Justice Sajjad Ali Shah of the Supreme Court, Chief Justice of Peshawar High Court Justice Qaiser Rashid Khan.

The retired judges including Justice Faisal Arab, Justices Ejaz Afzal Khan, Manzoor Ahmed Malik, Amir Hani Muslim, Iqbal

Hameedur Rehman, Rana Mohammad Shamim, Sheikh Najamul Hassan and Riaz Ahmed Khan have also been allotted plots.

Justice Ijazul Ahsan and Justice Faisal Arab got two plots each in these sectors since being judge of superior courts they were entitled to two plots.

## Controversies galore

Over the last few years, FGEHA has been inundated with complaints of out-of-turn allotments. The recent instance in which the Authority has allotted plots to majority of the Supreme Court, High Courts, and district courts judges, several senior bureaucrats have been found complaining of being deprived of plots.

Last year, a former secretary cabinet Abu Akif challenged the allotment of plots to Azam Khan, the Principal Secretary to the Prime Minister and other well-connected bureaucrats including Hasan Nasir Jamy, Mohammad Aslam, Mian Asad Hayaud-din, Zafar Hassan, Mohammad Javed Ghani, Fazal Yazdani Khan, Syed Ejaz Ali Shah Wasti, and Shafqat Jalil.

As per documents of the Capital Development Authority (CDA), the FGEHA delayed the allotment of plots to bureaucrats for four months. During this time, at least six officers in grade 22 retired, making their successors eligible for the plots instead.

It is said that the authority despite issuing letters to the retired bureaucrats of 7th Common a couple of years ago, excluded them in the recent balloting and allotted the plots to the junior ones.

It may be mentioned that the Islamabad High Court (IHC) also pointed out loopholes in the allotment of plots to the judges of district courts observing that those judges who have been sacked for allegations of corruption and misconduct has been rewarded with the expensive plots on throwaway prices.

IHC has suspended the allotment to the district judiciary and constituted larger bench to hear this matter on September 13.

## FGEHA's position

FGEHA on the other hand claimed of allotment of plots in transparent manner. The authority stated that it started registration under membership drive Phase-II on 'age-wise seniority basis' for federal government employees and other specified groups in April 2015 as per approved quota policy and eligibility criteria of the scheme."

Almost 80,000 members got registered, including government servants from BS-1 to BS-22 as well as judges of superior/lower judiciary till May 2016, the FGEHA said, adding that the allottees whose names were included in balloting of plots for sectors F-14/15 were issued consent letters in 2016 whereas balloting was conducted to allocate them plot numbers only.

The Authority further said that 1,704 allottees of F-14/15 of category-1 (BS-20 to BS-22) including judges, who fulfilled the approved policy of FGEHA, were allotted plots through random computerised balloting on 17 August 2021 in a transparent manner whereas 1,690 allottees of category-2 (BS-18 to BS-19) and 1,329 allottees in category-3 (BS-16 to BS-17) were also allotted plots.

All allotments have been made as per approved criteria/policy of the FGEHA



and the balloting has been conducted for allocation of plot numbers to bona-fide allottees under transparent computerised balloting, the housing authority said.

## The genesis of FGEHA

The Federal Government Employees Housing Foundation (FGEHF) was established as a cell in Ministry of Housing & Works in 1989. In 2019, the government reconstituted it as Federal Government Employees Housing Authority through an Ordinance. It stated purpose was to initiate, launch, sponsor and implement housing schemes for Federal Government Employees on ownership basis in all major cities of Pakistan.

Initially, this scheme was for the government servants only. However, on 8 November 1999, the Lahore High Court (LHC) Rawalpindi bench hearing a case related to the acquisition of land for sector G-13 had, prescribed the criteria for allotment of plots to judges of the superior courts.

The bench had given directions to include employees of autonomous and semi-autonomous organisations, the Election Commission of Pakistan, Supreme Court, Federal Shariat Court and LHC Rawalpindi bench, the National Assembly, senior members of the armed forces, journalists, doctors, engineers, and lawyers.

The same bench had also directed the housing foundation to allot plots to senior lawyers, namely Sharifuddin Pirzada, as well as former Chief of Naval Staff retired Admiral Fasih Bokhari.

## Pakistan's housing deficit

Housing is a basic and fundamental human need. Pakistan is grappling with a worsening housing crisis. Rapid population growth, overcrowding, development of slums and Katchi Abadis, scarcity of land and lack of financial resources have further aggravated the situation.

Pakistan is the seventh-most populous country in the world. According to the 2017 census, its population is 207.7 million and has grown at the rate of 2.4 percent per year in the intercensal period.

Its urban population, on the other hand, has grown at the rate of 2.7 percent per year during the same period and is estimated at 75.5 million. According to the 2017 census, total number of housing units throughout the country was 32.2 million, 63.6 percent of which were rural areas and 36.4 percent in urban areas.

As per provisional results of 2017 census, the urban population shows a growing trend with 36.4 percent of the population living in urban areas. The comparative position of Provinces and Areas shows similar trend in urban population with a slightly higher increase in Punjab.

On the other hand, a significant decrease has been observed in the share of Urban population in federal capital Islamabad, which gone down from 65.72 percent to 50.58 percent, indicating that growth occurred in the rural areas of Islamabad.

Among the provinces, Sindh is the most urbanized province, where 52.02 percent population lives in urban areas.



# Pakistani Startups Eye Record Investment

*The local startup ecosystem has great promise but there are regulatory, taxation, and cultural challenges to overcome.*



By Azeem Waqas

After lapping up USD 125 million in the first six months, the Pakistani startup ecosystem is all set to attract more than USD 250 million in investment during the year 2021 – one of the highest levels of startup finance over a year in the country's history.

In 2020, Pakistani startups received 65 million USD in investment. Pakistan's financial ecosystem is transforming to a digital landscape where investments are coming into the startups mostly being run by the young entrepreneurs Pakistanis.

Startups require an idea, a small team, and seed funding which grows with the passage of the time.

In 2020 the startups raised money in Ecommerce, Healthtech, Supply Chain, Travel and Leisure, and Fintech and Agriculture. Airlift has raised USD 24.7 million, Bykea USD 18.8 million and Tajir USD 17

million.

Data compiled by the Invest2innovate shows that from 2013 to 2020, USD 9.4 million in funding was raised by Pakistan startups. While 35 percent of i2i startups have already raised funding in 2021.

"The startup sector is growing really fast in Pakistan. 2021 looks certain to be one of the highest startup activity years in history for Pakistan", says Habibullah Khan, founder at Penumbra, a digital marketing agency.

The biggest sectors receiving money are FinTech and Ecommerce. They raised USD 44.1 million and USD 47.1 million respectively in first half of 2021.

Habibullah said that FinTech and Ecommerce will continue to be important. "I feel we will see two more sectors start receiving more investments. Healthtech that improve care for patients and Edutech whereby

education goes digital should start attracting more investment. Logistics is another area that will continue to see investment activity as freight and trucking digitization happens."

"The boom in startups is due to foreign investors", says Omer Abedin, Director National Incubation Centre Karachi. "Out of USD 125 million 80 percent is foreign investment and only 20 percent is local investment which shows the mind-set of our local investors who are reluctant to invest in startups".

Abedin says the 20 percent local investors are those who have already worked in Silicon Valley – they know the startup industry and they are prepared to bet for long term gains.

Startup industry is facing a huge challenge of over regulations and an old mind-set of the bankers and bureaucracy where the

polymakers think that technology is not a tangible industry, Omer Abedin said.

Habibullah Khan says, "Startups face a few challenges. As startup ecosystem continues to grow fast, and technical talent is becoming expensive and hard to find."

Pakistani financial system is getting better at supporting startups but ease of doing business for startups can still be improved. Certainly, the ability to get cash-flow loans based on business in hand, without pledging collateral would be helpful but it does not happen, he added.

Omer Abedin said that foreign investors are looking at our startup scene keenly and are investing hugely in Pakistan despite the Covid-19. Many international companies are also coming to invest in Pakistan.

He said that venture capital investments are long-term investments. Pakistan needs to accelerate its economic growth and attraction for foreigners to enhance investments in startups. India has captured an investment of USD 10 billion in startups during the last six months.

Omer Abedin says that Regulatory challenges are huge. For setting a venture capital firm, it requires at least one year to get license only. SECP, SBP and FBR are the major regulators and they are not resolving the basic issues of the industry.

He said that one of the major challenges is local investors who are not coming into startups. Local investors are only looking for short-term gains. Foreign investors know that startups are the long-term investment but have huge gains. Startups gains are usually 700 to 800 times in 10 years.

In venture capital, you make several small investments and try to make it huge like Careem a Pakistani startup which has been purchased at USD 3.5 billion by Uber – an American company, says Omer.

Omer said that Pakistani financial system does not support startup industry. Pakistani banks do not understand how startups work. They ask for collateral, mortgage and ironclad Return on Investment commitments. Banks supports

investments in conventional industry. Sadapay and Nayapay are growing which will change the conventional banking system of Pakistan.

He said that 90 percent startups are driven by technology. Technology platforms are also industries. For example Google which has a value of USD 1 trillion. Government should formulate a comprehensive policy to encourage startups in Pakistan.

Pakistan having a population of 220 million does not have a globally recognized brand in conventional products and on the other hand Denmark has hundred of international brands only because of the policy which supports startups.



Habibullah Khan suggested that Startups need government support and intervention and the economic activity startups generate, efficiencies they enable and FDI they attract means government should give that support. Policy is key. Not only should this momentum be supported with incentives, the government needs to clarify rules around data privacy and sharing so startups can combine identity with unified payments to innovate.

We also need special zones where investors can confidently invest in startups, academia and industry combine, and transfer of knowledge happens because of indigenous manufacturing of technology products. The launching of Special Technology Zones Authority is a great move by this government in that direction.

Ambreen Baig of Invest2innovate says, "Invest2innovate has been accelerating startups in the Pakistan startup ecosystem since 2011 and has also supported incubators and accelerators in the region ever since. Invest2innovate believes that the next great entrepreneurs will come from growth markets such as Pakistan. Therefore, Invest2innovate provides startups in the country the support needed to see those

success stories emerge".

A recent report of KP startup Ecosystem states that despite the corporate tax exemption, startups in different provinces are still paying various other taxes such as GST, property taxes, provincial sales tax, and that too at different rates. For example, sales tax on services is 15 percent in KP and Balochistan, 16 percent in Punjab, and 13 percent in Sindh.

Particularly in the case of startups, paying differing taxes may impact their liquidity. Additionally, while taxes may have decreased for certain industries like IT, which is 2 percent in KP to encourage migration of business to the province, in actuality the total number of taxes that need to be paid is excessive (GST, property sales tax, provincial sales tax).

The report highlights the need to develop special policies aimed at resolving prevailing startup-focused challenges. Additionally, tax exemptions should be offered to startups across all industries instead of just being limited to the IT or e-commerce sectors.

This can be implemented in the form of tax exemptions for early stage startups from all industries enabling them to use their resources to finance outsourcing activities, which increase competitiveness and eliminate liquidity issues. As an example, according to the most recent budget proposed in India, all startups incorporated between 1 April 2016 and 31 March 2021 are eligible for a three-year tax holiday in a block of seven years.

Recently, the Federal Government and Pakistan Software Houses Association (P@SHA) announced the creation of the Special Technology Zone Authority (STZA) focused on boosting the local IT-Sector. The proposal aims to create a tech sector ecosystem in different cities that will power the development of tech exports.

The STZA will offer startups in all provinces with multiple incentives including exemption from all taxes such as customs duties and General Sales Tax, report states.



# Growing Our Startup Ecosystem

*Investment in human capital and academia-industry linkages are key to fostering a world-class startup ecosystem, says aspiring data scientist Amina Baig*



By Azeem Waqas

The Pakistani startup ecosystem is picking up steam but at the same time it is facing basic challenges of outmoded regulations and lack of support by the government. The Truth International (TTI) Magazine asked few questions to Amina Baig who is an aspiring data scientist and working with the Invest2Innovate, a business incubation centre providing business support services to startups in the ecosystem since 2012.

The following are the few excerpts from the conversation.

**TTI: What is a startup in Pakistan?**

**AB:** We do not have a consensus on the definition of startup even globally. In Pakistan too, there are different definitions of startups used by different agencies. FBR has its own definition and SBP uses a different definition.

If you look at the traditional businessman of Pakistan who has spent lot of time in family business, I think the concept of startup is often misunderstood. There is a gap in understanding of startup and a traditional business – which can be an SME.

People in traditional business do not understand this difference. A lot of time they do not even have the capacity to

blitzscale, which is often enabled by technology, and these are some key components of what we call a startup in Pakistan.

**TTI: How has the startup industry grown over the years in Pakistan?**

**AB:** Fintech, e-commerce, healthtech, and edutech have been mushrooming over the past few years but specifically since 2020 we have seen a huge jump. Some 41 deals have already been done this year, a huge improvement over the last year. Deal sizes are also bigger than past. We have a USD 85-millions deal which was done by Airlift and it was announced a couple of days ago.

Then there was another round by Bazzar which was USD 30 million. The regulator such as NADRA, SBP, PTA, SECP have been much more sensitive towards the needs of the startup sector in Pakistan and they have started designing policy reforms which are very responsive to the needs of the key stakeholders in the ecosystem of Pakistan.

They are coming up with RAAST which is a micro payment gateway. Entrepreneur support organizations have seen a lot of growth. A lot of international investors have also entered the market, which clearly means they see Pakistan as a lucrative market.

**TTI: What are some of the major regulatory challenges facing startups?**

**AB:** Every sector has different challenges. For example, fintech regulatory challenges are different from e-commerce. There is a lot of overlap between fintech and e-commerce. Fintech is integral to every other sector, because a startup actually does not have any other option to process payments.

Overarching regulatory challenges are taxation. Startups think that they do not have clarity on regulatory elements they need to comply that is unfriendliness of entire regulatory ecosystem. We do not have a one-window solution in Pakistan. What we call a one-window solution is not a one-window solution at all. We are long way from getting there in terms of regulation.

Investors have complained that the documentation is not at par, and using stamp papers and other outdated instruments. Digital solutions are not available for such things in Pakistan. Moving money in and out from Pakistan is also a huge challenge for investors. Although lot of work has been done to improve the regulatory framework, a lot more needs to be done.

**TTI: Which startup sectors are receiving most investments?**

**AB:** Ecommerce is leading – it claimed

61 percent of all investments, while fintech raised 14 percent. USD 85 million raised by Airlift Company is actually an ecommerce investment. This has been the biggest round of funding to take place in the Pakistani ecosystem. Deal sizes are rising and we see even bigger rounds of funding coming in the next few years.

All of the startups are looking for investments. A lot of fintech and ecommerce are looking for investments. One problem is that a lot of time, startups do not understand what kind of investment they need to raise, how much they need, and how they will be using it. This is a stumbling block in the way of a more vibrant ecosystem but this problem is inherent to all nascent ecosystems.

**TTI: To what extent does the Pakistani financial system support startups?**

**AB:** The financial landscape are improving. International investors are coming into Pakistani market and lot of them are actually looking at Pakistan as well. One major issue for international investors is lack of data and information about Pakistani startups. For someone not on the ground, it can be very tough to understand the workings of the market. I2I is here to help bridge that data gap.

**TTI: Why are Pakistani investors not keen on startups?**

**AB:** We need local investments as well. Local money going into startups can actually encourage international money coming as well. Local investors have been coinvesting with international investors which is a great sign. Typically we have seen that international investors are investing more than local investors in startups. Bigger round of B2C and C2C are from international investors.

**TTI: Does the government has any startups scheme and action plan?**

**AB:** Government has an action plan for startups previously it has R&D fund which is now called Ignite. Ignite is also funding international incubation centres

in five cities of Pakistan. They are also working on its expansion plan to 15 other cities. National Incubation centres are also providing business support to startups. They also hold an investors summit.

A government-funded initiative, the Offices of Research, Innovation and Commercialization (ORICs) carry out research innovation and commercialisation. Business incubation centres have also been established in Pakistan. Both of these need to support budding entrepreneurs.

**TTI: What are your suggestions to promote startups in Pakistan?**

**AB:** I think government needs to take a step study what kind of startups they need to encourage. We have heard from our surveys that startups are not satisfied with the services being provided. Governance issues such as staff is not available in these business incubation centres, and attitude towards startups is not very friendly.

Teachers and trainers in universities and centres have actually been advising students against considering entrepreneurship as a career path. The government is putting so much money in BICs but if they are not even interested in idea of entrepreneurship, what good is all of that money.

There are problems in terms of scoping and type of interventions that are being designed. A lot of things need to be done at regulatory level making investment easier for international investors, moving money in and out of Pakistan. Sectors wise regulations need to be improved.

Above all, human capital needs to be improved and academia needs to be in touch with the industry. Fintech regulations need to be improved. There is a need to relax minimum paid capital requirements for startups compared to other financial institutions.



# 36 Months of Khan-Do

*A look at PTI government's first three years in office.*



The government of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) has completed first three years of its five-year term in August 2021 amid hope and despair. The party came to power in August 2018 with a simple majority in the parliament.

From the day one, the performance of PTI has been a deeply divisive issue in the country. PTI supporters are still optimistic of improvement in the governance and economy of Pakistan while the opponents are terming party's rule as a total disappointment.

## Early days

In fact, when the PTI came to power, the government was facing challenge of averting a default like situation as foreign exchange reserves of the country were barely equal to six weeks' imports while the current account and fiscal deficits were at alarming stage. Meanwhile, the PML(N) government left the energy sector debt at 1.1 trillion rupees creating a vicious cycle for the new government.

In this situation, on the one hand the Pakistan Stock Exchange tumbled to below 40,000 points from about 48,000 to 50,000 points while on the other the value of dollar continued to surge amid uncertain economic situation at that time. The PTI government inherited dollar-rupee value around 118 rupees,

but within few months the dollar-rupee exchange rate crossed 170 rupees mark.

To overcome challenges on the economic front, the PTI government formed an 18-member Economic Advisory Council in 2018, which gave a go-ahead to the government to obtain a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund.

Although the Prime Minister Imran Khan had publicly vowed to 'die instead of begging' for loans from IMF

and the World Bank when the party was in opposition, the PTI government followed the easy and a traditional path and signed up for USD 6 billion loan from the IMF.

The IMF deal contained economic erosion in the country for the time being, but paved the way for a consistent price hike in Pakistan in the shape of devaluation, frequent increase in prices of electricity, gas, petroleum products, and elimination of subsidies, etc.

Notably, the dollar-rupee exchange hit the record high mark of 170 rupees ahead of Pakistan's decision to obtain loan from the IMF and analysts believe that devaluation was one of the preconditions of the IMF, which is why the government remained silent as dollar soared to record high exchange values

against the rupee.

When the PTI came to power, the foremost challenge before it was the accountability of corrupt politicians, businessmen, and bureaucrats because the party had drummed well corruption issue for years with assertions that every year 1200 billion rupees are falling in the hands of corrupt leaders and others in the country.

Consequently, the government launched a crackdown against politicians and others, involved in mega corruption cases, put many leaders behind the bars, but the outcome was not as good as was promised by the PTI chairman Imran Khan, when he was in the opposition. Thus, on this front the government has been facing criticism for not making any headway.

Governance was another issue where the PTI government did not fulfil the expectations of the masses. As the party got a simple majority in 2018 elections, the party had to accommodate traditional turncoats to form government, which was also a compromise on the PTI's agenda pertaining to formation of cabinet with neat and lean ministers and advisors.

On this front, the PTI has lost its credibility while the masses have suffered a lot in the shape of sugar, flour, petrol crisis and an unending

price hike, which doubled prices of flour, sugar, eggs, rice and many other essential consumer items during the first three years of the PTI government.

Devaluation added fuel to the fire as all the imported consumer items became very expensive, especially petroleum products, LPG, tea, edible oil, and electricity generated through oil and RLNG.

Providing 10 million jobs too proved a herculean task for the government as Covid-19 gripped the country like others in the world in early months of 2020, which badly undermined the business activities and made millions of people jobless because of downsizing and closure of businesses throughout the country.

To silence the critics, the government launched different initiatives, including construction of one million houses through subsidized bank loans. At one time, the Information Minister Fawad Chaudhary honestly told the media that it was not the responsibility of the government to provide jobs to unemployed people and private sector should create jobs.

This bitter truth of outspoken minister raised an uproar in the country and disappointed those who were expecting jobs from the government.

However, Prime Minister Imran Khan's national housing programme gave some support to the government as thousands of people have borrowed money from banks at 6 percent markup to buy/build homes. Until June 2021, thousands of people have obtained home loans at the lowest mark-up while more are getting such loans this year as the government has extended this scheme until Dec 2021.

Additionally, the government launched the Ehsas Programme and offered cash assistance and free meals to thousands of needy people during the Covid pandemic.

## Achievements of PTI government

To its credit, the government has succeeded in reigning in the current account deficit, which was at USD 15 billion in 2018-19, when PTI came to power and in 2020-21, the CAD has dropped to USD 1.5 billion.

**By Javed Mahmood**

Similarly, the government has enhanced exports to record high, at USD 25.3 billion in 2020-21 and set the target of USD 29 billion for the ongoing fiscal year (2021-22).

Likewise, the remittances have also increased to USD 29.4 billion in FY2020-21, setting a new record in the history of the country. In comparison with USD 23.3 billion remittances in 2019-20, the inflows of expatriates' money increased almost by six billion dollars in 2020-21.

To promote remittances, the government also launched the Roshan Digital Account (RDA), which has so far attracted USD 2 billion in deposits and played a vital role in enhancing remittances and boosting the national reserves of Pakistan.

Another front where the government has made a visible improvement is the foreign exchange reserves held by the State Bank of Pakistan. Now hovering around USD 18 billion, the SBP's forex stash is set to cross USD 20 billion for the first time on 23 August 2021 when the IMF hands over USD 2.8 billion unconditional loan to Pakistan under its USD 650 billion global package to provide liquidity support to different countries to off-set impact of the ongoing pandemic.

At present, the reserves with the domestic banks are around USD 7 billion and by Aug 24, national reserves would cross USD 27 billion for the first time.

## The way forward

Some key economic indicators have shown improvement in 2021. The PTI government, therefore, must concentrate on consolidation of economic expansion in its remaining two years. From July 2021, the first month of the fiscal year 2021-22, the current account deficit has opened with more or less USD 800 million mainly because of rapid growth in imports, which widened the trade deficit beyond USD 3 billion.

In July this year, the national exports have mounted to USD 2.3 billion while the trade deficit enlarged to USD 3.05 billion in comparison with USD 1.7 billion deficit in the corresponding month in 2020. Imports in July this year expanded to above USD 5



billion with 46 percent growth over the same month last year which boosted the trade imbalance.

If this trend continued in FY22, the country will, indeed, suffer a lot in the shape of extra expenditures of billions of dollars and further spike in the dollar-rupee exchange rate that already had expanded to 166 rupees as of 27 August 2021, as against 152 rupees a month ago.

Additionally, the government should also curb the fast-expanding circular debt, which hit 2.28 trillion rupees in June 2021, from 1.1 trillion rupees in 2018-19. Thus, in its first year, the PTI added PKR 464 billion to the energy sector debt, PKR 538 billion were added in the second year and now after adjusting subsidies and increase in tariffs, the net increase in circular debt was PKR 130 billion in the third year.

Hence, the circular debt continues to pose a threat to the economic recovery and if the government neglects it further, it may prove more disastrous than the Covid19 pandemic.

In addition, the government should accelerate construction and manufacturing sectors, encourage private sector investment to create jobs to offset the Covid impact and absorb millions of people who have lost their jobs because of the pandemic-driven economic slowdown in the country.

The government should also pay attention to boosting economic activity by incentivising starting/expanding businesses, increase/utilization of funds for maximum development projects, and promote tourism as much as possible.

Lastly, giving relief to people from price-hike is essential and the government must reign in the unabated trend of frequent hike in prices of essential consumer items.



*CandyLand*

# HAR PAKISTANI KI JAAN MAIN MILI!





## Geoeconomics on Steroids

*Pakistan's near-term economic wellbeing hinges on Islamabad playing ball with Washington over Afghanistan.*



By Khalique Ahmad

As Prime Minister Imran Khan's government enters the home-stretch, Pakistan's economic wellbeing depends largely on the pleasure of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) – and so does smooth political sailing for the government, given that economic hardship automatically translates to political turbulence.

Pakistan needs the IMF on its side with an active or in-recess programme to sail through tough domestic and global economic conditions.

During the current fiscal alone, Pakistan needs inflows to the tune of USD 90 billion to meet its various outflow obligations – imports, debt repayments, etc. The coming years would be no different.

Many non-IMF funding avenues – particularly those afforded by the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, Islamic Development Bank, international bonds and many other bilateral sources – are strongly linked to the Fund's blessing. Without IMF support, most if not all of

these sources of funding would dry.

The IMF's support is in turn dependent, directly or indirectly, on Islamabad playing ball Washington over Afghanistan.

Pakistan's extended fund facility (EFF) with International Monetary Fund (IMF) is currently 'in recess', in Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin's words, who despite this recess believes that Fund programme is hale and hearty.

As we go to the press, the two sides are in talks for a possible revival of the USD 6-billion programme by the executive board in time for the IMF-World Bank annual meetings (11-17 October 2021).

The parties, however, have to bridge the gaps over power sector revival and constituency-targeted flagship Kamyab Pakistan Programme worth PKR 1.6 trillion for the next couple of years.

The authorities appear comfortable on the third point – revenue side, embold-

ened by over the 22 percent revenue growth recorded in July. And that is what Mr Tarin would like to sell during negotiation – look we are performing more than we committed to deliver PKR 5.8 trillion revenues, give us time to perform in power sector too.

Mr Tarin has a point here. He believes a tariff hike would be counterproductive, rendering the industry uncompetitive, adding inflationary pressure on poor and common people, encouraging tax evasion increasing losses.

The government, therefore, should be allowed a grace period of probably up to two years to absorb the surplus power capacity through growth in economy. Incidentally, that dovetails nicely into the PTI government's political calculations.

During this grace period, he argues, the power distribution companies could be improved through reduction in losses and some sort of moratorium on power sector debt repayments. But this is not



any easy thing to do.

Pakistan also needs to allay the Fund's concerns about the Kamyab Pakistan Programme. The questions pertain to the capacity of partner financial institutions and whether or not the government's guarantee would cover 100 percent of the risk, or if this huge exposure could be a threat to financial and banking sector stability.

The Finance Minister says that the KPP would not be rolled back as it's the first-ever initiative taken for the poor and lower and middle classes. He asserts all risk mitigation measures have been put in place.

He points out that non-governmental agencies like Akhuwat, NRSP, and Kashf have a proven track record and have even delivered 99 percent recovery rate during Covid-19 assistance.

There would also be a proper oversight mechanism. For banks, the SBP would ensure its monitoring and audit activities. Mr Tarin concedes that the geopolitical situation is not in Pakistan's favour in terms of IMF's engagement as had been a few years ago.

It does not help that Pakistan's economy is still in deep doldrums. The current account deficit (CAD) has returned with a vengeance after initial two years of surplus propagated by the government as the single biggest achievement.

However, Mr Tarin argues that the USD 1.6 billion deficit suffered in June was a seasonal surge. He hopes CAD would remain 2 to 3 percent of GDP at the end of the year as estimated by the State Bank of Pakistan.

Mr Tarin projects all inflows for the current fiscal to come to about USD 90-92 billion. This includes proceeds from exports, remittances, Roshan Digital Accounts, foreign direct investment, bilateral loans, and market based bonds.

Total outflows – including debt repayments and imports – are projected to



overshoot this amount by USD 2 to USD 2.5 billion. Hence, while not negligible, the CAD will be manageable.

He, however, agrees that there are still higher risks on the external account given uncertainty over the direction of international oil prices and commodity prices as Pakistan continues to rely heavily on food imports – wheat, sugar, palm oil and pulses – which are not only a drain on the foreign exchange reserves but also result in imported inflation.

This, however, shows that external account projections assumed in the federal budget 2021-22 are turning out to be unrealistic within the first quarter of the fiscal year. For example, the annual plan 2021-22 had projected the CAD to be at 0.7 percent of GDP in 2021-22 with projected growth of exports and imports at 6.5 percent and 9.5 percent, respectively.

It is against this background that the government has now revived the Monetary and Fiscal Policy Coordination Board for adjustments in designing and executing policies to achieve economic targets and overcome the possible risks.

In recent days, the government has given initial hints at checking non-essential imports as commerce division anticipates imports going beyond USD 70 billion as the rupee slid against the dollar by over 8 percent in less than three months. Even an additional, unconditional

injection of USD 2.75 billion by the IMF and has not been able to stop the slide.

The Prime Minister now requires the Finance Minister to present latest external account projections on a monthly basis along with policy adjustments to avoid surprises.

The situation strongly suggest the government's latest estimates about exports, imports, and foreign direct investment are not in agreement with the budget estimates. What is more, the latest estimates by Planning Commission, Commerce Division, and the State Bank of Pakistan show significant mutual variance.

As a result, the first month trade deficit had widened by almost 86 percent to USD 3.1 billion this year as imports jumped by 48 percent to USD 5.4 billion while exports increased by only 16.4 percent to USD 2.3 billion when compared to same month last fiscal.

The central bank estimates imports at USD 64 billion while Commerce Division expects it at USD 70 billion. The SBP expects exports at USD 27 billion for current year against USD 30 billion being projected by the Commerce Division.

Based on this, the SBP is keeping the CAD range between USD 6.5 billion to USD 9.5 billion while Finance Division at USD 13 billion – almost the same as seen in PTI's first year in power.

# Mobile-Phones Manufacturing in Pakistan Surpasses Cell-phones' Import

*Thanks to sustained policy emphasis, local manufacturing of smartphones is expanding, and exports have commenced.*

By Javed Hussain

Islamabad: The production of mobile phones by local manufacturing plants has surpassed the number of mobile phones' imports in the country. During Jan-July 2021, the production of mobile phones by local manufacturing plants was 12.27 Million and imported mobile phones was recorded at 8.29 Million.

This trend reflects a positive uptake on PTA's Mobile Device Manufacturing (MDM) Authorization regulatory regime whereby local manufacturing within the first year of regime introduction has resulted in production of 12.27 Million phones in a short span of 7 months including 4.87 million 4G smartphones.

The successful implementation of Device Identification Registration and Blocking System (DIRBS) along with conducive government policies including the mobile manufacturing policy has created a favour-

able environment for mobile device manufacturing in Pakistan. It has also contributed positively to the mobile ecosystem of Pakistan by eliminating counterfeit device market providing a level playing field for commercial entities and has created trust amongst consumers due to the formulation of standardized legal channels for all sorts of device imports.

It is important to highlight that the Government of Pakistan introduced a comprehensive mobile manufacturing policy to encourage and attract manufacturers to establish their units in Pakistan. PTA in light of the policy issued Mobile Device Manufacturing (MDM) Regulations on 28th January, 2021. Till now, 26 companies have been issued MDM authorization enabling them to manufacture mobile devices in Pakistan. The companies include renowned brands e.g. Samsung, Nokia, Oppo, TECNO, Infinix, Vgotel, Q-mobile etc.

Meanwhile, early benefits of Prime Minister Imran Khan's Digital Pakistan initiative have started to trickle in – as evidenced by the recent export of 5,500 locally manufactured 4G smartphones to the UAE.

Pakistan has one of the largest markets for use of mobile devices with a yearly appetite of around 40 million devices per year. Therefore, manufacturing of devices locally is a key step towards fulfilling this demand and creating skilled jobs in the country. The move should bring prices down, resulting in more affordable devices for consumers.

According to statistics maintained by PTA, Pakistan's subscriber base reached 159 million in CY 2019, making it the eight largest online population in the world. As per PTA data, mobile subscriptions crossed 164 million in CY 2020.

Owing to significant size of population and continuous growth in mobile connectivity,





Pakistan is the world's seventh largest handset importer in the world as per Trade Map Data. This makes Pakistan market an attractive destination for global brands. However, currently the market is largely dependent on imports as local manufacturing regime remains unattractive.

According to PTA, Pakistan's total annual market size (2G/3G/4G) is estimated at 34 million handsets out of which 20 million are 2G and 14 million units are 3G and 4G collectively. Following are the changing trends in mobile market of Pakistan.

During the two-year period between January 2018 and December 2019, the share of 4G devices grew from 16 percent to 31 percent; 3G devices shrank from 19 percent to 13 percent; while 2G devices decreased from 64 percent to 56 percent. This clearly reveals the local market is shifting gradually towards latest technology.

Device Identification, Registration and Blocking System (DIRBS) project of PTA has been instrumental in controlling smuggling of mobile phone devices in addition to providing safeguards against security hazards. International Mobile Equipment Identity (IMEI) registration requirement under DIRBS has resulted in growth of both local manufacturing and imports through legal channels.

According to the import statistics shared by PTA and the benchmark analysis, after the introduction of DIRBS, the commercial imports have shown increase from 17.2 million units in 2018 to 28.2 million mobile devices in 2019. The significant increase of 64 percent reveals that imports through grey channels have been converted into legal imports.

Local assembly exhibited 147 percent growth during calendar year 2019.

Analysis of available data shows that the imports have increased by 11 million devices while local manufacturing has grown by 7.64 million. This means local manufacturing could not benefit fully from introduction of DIRBS, and further potential still exists to convert the imports into local manufacturing thus ensuring jobs for educated youth including engineers, technicians, and skilled and semi-skilled workers.

PTA granted permission to 29 local companies for manufacturing out of which 19 are

operational.

Pakistan's mobile manufacturing policy offers zero custom duties/taxes for manufacturing of devices that fall in the slab of USD 0 to 350. It allows 3 percent R&D rebate on export of mobile devices, which encourages local manufacturer to export such smartphone devices bearing "Manufactured in Pakistan" to global markets.

Local manufacturers have shown satisfaction on approval of mobile phone policy and are of the considered opinion that investment in this sector will start pouring in.

Until recently, most of the local companies were manufacturing 2G feature phones. Many are now shifting to manufacturing smartphones as technology is shifting towards 4G/5G.



Recently, Pakistan Telecom Authority (PTA) Authorization holder Inovi Telecom started exporting smartphones. The first consignment of 5,500 units of 4G smartphones carrying "Manufactured in Pakistan" tag was shipped to the UAE.

Notably, Inovi Telecom Pvt. Ltd was issued mobile manufacturing authorization by PTA on 9 April 2021. Within 4 months, the company has managed to achieve exporting 'Manufactured in Pakistan' phones.

Before this, PTA has issued authorization to Lucky Motor Corporation to Manufacture Samsung Mobile Devices in Pakistan.

In accordance with Mobile Device Manufacturing (MDM) Regulations 2021, PTA has issued MDM authorization to Lucky Motor Corporation Limited for manufacturing of Samsung brand mobile devices. This is a landmark achievement and will

further revolutionize the vibrant mobile manufacturing ecosystem in the country by ensuring presence of major local and foreign players in the market.

This is possible only due to the conducive policies of the Government of Pakistan in its "Digital Pakistan" endeavour.

PTA has so far issued MDM authorizations to 26 foreign and local companies for the production of mobile devices (2G/3G/4G) locally. Mobile devices manufactured by these companies shall not only be sold in the country but will also be exported to other competitive markets of the region and beyond. The device manufacturing plants shall be instrumental in creating new job opportunities as well as enabling affordability of mobile devices for Pakistani users.

Federal Minister for Industries and Production Muhammad Hammad Azhar says that mobile device manufacturing industry has a huge potential in Pakistan. It is one of the top five industries across the globe that plays an important role in spurring economic growth.

The mobile devices are also transforming the future of e-government which will further increase the demand of mobile devices in Pakistan. Government of Pakistan has decided to provide a comprehensive, well defined policy that aims essentially to promote local manufacturing of PTA approved mobile devices in Pakistan.

The policy aims to address the core issues faced by mobile device manufacturers and to provide an attractive tariff environment over the policy period, besides other non-tariff initiatives to promote "Make in Pakistan" strategy for mobile devices.

# Research Firm Bullish on Afghan Situation

*AKD Securities takes an optimistic view of the Afghan situation, and sees Pakistan reaping benefits of peace and political stability.*



## TTI Report

The transition in Afghanistan could help Pakistan build closer ties with its Western allies, a report by market research firm AKD Securities Limited has said. The prestigious firm routinely contributes market research to Bloomberg, firstcall.com, Reuters Knowledge, and Research Pool.

The report views the Afghan transition to Taliban control a positive development that “finally puts an end to the uncertainty over the political future of Afghanistan”.

“In contrast to what had been feared, the Taliban seek to present a moderate face by offering general amnesty to masses, preserving the infrastructure deployed in the past 20 years while remaining mostly in compliance with agreements forged with the international community, opening up possibility of international recognition of the new political setup”, says the report, noting that China, Pakistan, and Iran are on the same page on maintaining stability in Afghanistan.

“Major regional powers in the region like China, Iran and Pakistan have all showed a willingness to work with the new setup in Afghanistan and help maintain peace in the region”, notes the report. “The geographical and political dynamics have changed significantly since the last time Taliban government was in power in Afghanistan with China establishing its strong presence in the region through economic corridors in Pakistan and also in Iran”.

The economic corridors in Pakistan and Iran connect landlocked Afghanistan (and the central Asian Republics) to sea lanes via their seaports, allowing them access to global markets. Says the report, “The integrated economic interests of major powers in the region will help bring these players closer and work together and potentially bring peace and economic prosperity in the region.”

“With Pakistan likely being the preferred partner for the West amongst the Russia-China-Pakistan-Iran quartet to keep its influence (in some form) in the region, strengthening of relationship could unlock some concessions in medium- to long-run while improving prospects of Pakistan’s status with global agencies (IMF, FATF etc.)”, it adds.

The change has implications for Pak-Afghan trade as well. Pakistan’s net trade with Afghanistan stands at a miniscule USD 804 million, mostly consisting of food-related items while cements, pharma, and aluminum cans occupy a minimal share. We do not expect any material impact on cements given the robust domestic demand and coal alternatively imported through sea.

However, the report says tighter border controls in the near term could help stem the influx of smuggled products from Afghanistan, opening up prospects for local players such as in auto parts including tires etc., and consumer items.

The report says the KSE-100 index is likely to remain range bound in the near term, potentially following global markets where any correction should be taken as an opportunity to accumulate, given the market is currently trading at an unjustified P/E of 6.0x.

Further, the potential positive idiosyncrasies related to lasting peace in the region may help expand market multiples in the medium and long term. Currently, the market trades at a forward multiple of 6.0x and offers a dividend yield of 7.6 percent.

From Pakistan’s vantage point, the peaceful transition has so far ended concerns for a Civil war that could have resulted in unrest on our western border, increasing law and order risks and potentially putting our CPEC projects in jeopardy.

Equally important, the threat of an influx of refugees that could further put pressure on already strained fiscal side has been averted for now.

From the investment point of view, the report says the fall of Kabul in the hands of Taliban may not turn out to be as negative as feared earlier, especially if the major powers in the region show willingness to work together.

“Though still early at this point, a stable and peaceful Afghanistan will have positive spillover effects for Pakistan and the region at large”.



# Heeding the Wakeup Call of Tokyo Olympics

*A little attention from the top is all Pakistan needs to become a sports powerhouse once more.*

By Ali Abdullah

Sports are a significant part of Pakistani culture. The most popular sport of Pakistan is cricket followed by Hockey, which is the national sport of Pakistan and then there are polo, squash, badminton, tennis, golf, etc.

Cricket is a sport played in almost every house, from father to children though it does not mean it has a secure future in Pakistan. Cricket has never lost its lustre in the country. The team have been unpredictable since the beginning, though always stayed in the top league in the world.

Pakistan has always had superstars in cricket. Pakistan has won all the major ICC tournaments once. Batting is a weak point since always but their bowling attack have been one of the best always. Cricket runs in the nations' blood.

Talking about the national sport hockey, Pakistan use to be one of the greatest teams in the world. Pakistan is the most successful hockey team till date. The team has four World Cup trophies under their belt, winning their

first world cup in 1971 and last in 1994. Olympics has been a successful event for the team as well, with all of the country's eight Olympic medals coming from hockey.

Sadly the national sport is nowhere to be played in the country anymore. Hockey declined after 1994 in Pakistan, being the national sport of Pakistan and not seeing them qualify in Olympics after 2012.

Since 1998, when Jansher Khan was defeated in the British Open final, Pakistan squash has fallen from its height and now no longer is the dominant force in squash. No Pakistani has since reached the final of either the British or World Open.

Pakistan is the most successful nation in squash as well. Pakistan has won the two most prestigious titles in the game more than any other nation: the British



Open 30 times and the World Open 14 times.

The former Pakistan great Jahangir Khan, who was once the top ranked player in the world, has a record breaking winning streak of 555 matches. It is also one of the longest winning streaks by an athlete in any sport. He won the World Open six times, and the British Open ten consecutive times.

A country with such rich history in sports with a ton of records to their name was only able to send 10 athletes in Tokyo Olympics 2020. The question raised was, where did things go wrong?

A nation with population of 220 million was only able to produce 10 athletes for Tokyo Olympics? A nation of 220 million is unable to produce professional football players? Are there no swimmers in Pakistan? Is no one interested in tennis, hockey, volleyball, badminton or weightlifting? Do we not have any talent? Surprisingly the answer is that we are the nation who loves to play sports in their free time but there are reasons due to which we are unable to produce world-class athletes.

Most of the Pakistan's population belongs to middle class or lower middle class. Sport is a profession where there is no job security. An injury can end your whole career. Parents hesitate to allow their children to choose sport as a

profession, instead they push their children to do a job in government or private sector to have a more secure future.

But the bigger reason is systemic. The authorities seem oblivious to the importance of sports, and there is little or no funding available for the development of sports. The upshot is that players in Pakistan lack even the basic facilities for training. We have international standard stadiums in Pakistan.

This is not to say the sports board lacks funds. They have the funds but they have no mind to invest and then they also expect the athletes to win medals and world cups for the country. There's so much talent in Pakistan but unfortunately corruption has taken over everything.

Prime Minister Imran Khan was a sportsman himself. People were expecting him to fix all this but the graph is getting worse day by day. Let us hope Tokyo Olympics 2020 serves as a wakeup call for him as well as other authorities.

A little attention on the development of sports infrastructure and patronage of sports people is all we need before Pakistan starts producing superstars in every sport to make the nation proud.

# Shaheens' Eventful Tour of the Caribbean

*The Green Shirts had lots of good time on and off the field and bagged a victory each in Test and T20i.*

Despite the heartburn caused by three out of four Twenty20 International matches being washed out, Pakistan were the side who won the only game of the T20i series that did go through - and they bagged one of the two test matches in grand style, concluding the series 1-1.

Shaheens next stop after England was the Caribbean. Pakistan had to play against the West Indies for five Twenty20 Internationals and two Tests initially. However, the five T20I's were changed to four due to Covid-19.

Pakistan T20 squad travelled direct from England whereas the Test squad flew from Pakistan. Most of the T20 squad did not go home since PSL in June.

After losing the T20I and ODI series in England, Pakistani fans were full of fury. Pakistan team had to win this series to win their hearts again before the ICC T20 World Cup.

After quarantining for a few days, the T20 series started. Fans were eager for game to begin but unfortunately the match was washed out.

In the second T20I West Indies won the toss and elected to bowl first. Pakistani openers had a good enough start but Sharjeel Khan was gone early after scoring 20 of 16. Mohammad Rizwan and Babar Azam had the most successful partnership of the game.

The skipper scored another half century whereas wicket-keeper batsman Mohammad Rizwan was gone



4 runs short of his half century. Other than this pair rest failed to put a big total on the board. West Indies needed just 158 in twenty overs.

Gayle was sent to the pavilion by Hasan Ali and Andre Fletcher was gone for none courtesy Muhammad Hafeez. Evin Lewis was retired hurt and stay there. Nicholas Pooran scored a fiery 62 and made the match interesting, though wickets kept falling on the other end. If they had one more over to spare West Indies could have crossed the line easily. Pakistan won the game by just 7 runs. 7 minutes in the third T20 but due to rain the match was called off. Fourth T20 was abandoned due to rain as well without a ball bowled. Pakistan on the series 1-0.

It was expected that Pakistan will win the test series, but as always Pakistan, the unpredictable team, did not deliver as per their ranking. Pakistani openers failed as usual in the first innings. The skipper was

able to score 30 runs.

Fawad Alam scored another half century with Faheem Ashraf on the other end who scored 44. Pakistan set a total of just 217 in the first innings. Kraigg Brathwaite scored a brilliant 97. None of his team mates was successful other than the Jason Holder. He scored a half century too.

Fifty by the skipper was the only innings to watch as rest of the batting order failed to score big runs. With a total of 203, West Indies needed only 167 runs to win. The hosts were comfortable in the beginning but the Pakistani pace attack made it difficult to chase the small target.

In the end, the hosts won the first test match by just one wicket in hand.

Pakistan came back strongly in the second test. Again, Pakistan opener did not perform but middle order batsmen Babar Azam and Fawad Alam played a sensible innings. Fawad scored his fifth

century and became the fastest to score five centuries. Babar Azam also scored 75 runs.

The most impressive play was by the 21-year-old fast bowler Shaheen Shah Afridi. He took 10 wickets in the match and these were the best figures by a Pakistani fast bowler after 2006. Pakistan won the test match easily by 109 runs in the end even after losing a day due to rain.

Pakistan team returned to Pakistan although Coach Misbah ul Haq could not travel with the squad as he tested positive for Covid-19.

Next on Pakistan's agenda was an Afghanistan tour, which has been postponed until 2022 due to the on-going situation in Afghanistan.

By Ali Abdullah



## Stuck in the Pipeline

*Their flicks were ready to premier when Covid-19 hit and the theatres shut down because of Covid 19. Here's how they are feeling.*



By Hasan Kazmi

**C**ovid 19 has played havoc with our already struggling film industry.

Many films are ready to be released but cinemas are closed. Producers have invested a huge amount in films. Directors and actors have worked tirelessly for months to complete their projects.

Other staff is also worried about how they would meet their ends if film industry in the country calls a pack-up due to unavailability of screening options and ultimately no financial returns.

The Truth International (TTI) reached directors who have almost completed their films and waiting for the appropriate time to release them.

The focus was on the current status of their work, what hope they see as many cinemas may not survive another year, digital release of their films, and the situation of production staff that work with them on their films.

### Wajahat Rauf - Parde Main Rehne Do

Wajahat Rauf needs no introduction when it comes to our new revived film industry started at the beginning of the last decade. He has already directed three films, all box office successes. He has completed his next project 'Parde Main Rehne Do' with Hania Amir and Ali Rehman as leads.

He is also very concerned about his film as Covid 19 has played havoc with our already struggling film industry, "It always was a tough industry with less than 140 screens and zero support from the government. Now with the cinemas closed, our investments are stuck and we can't make our next film."

Does he see any hope as many cinemas may not survive another year? Rauf is upbeat but with the support of government: "To have hope is always good. Again, with government support, we can overcome this. Worldwide there are

relief packages given to affected industries. But I don't see any movement in the right direction here."

Asked if he would go for a digital release of his film if this situation persists for long, he said, "Yes. Like most of us, we have also reached out. But due to no real OTT platforms here, we are looking at international platforms. It is a tough sell though."

He adds that he would urge the state to support the film industry with relief packages, or it would die yet again.

In the current crisis, Rauf has taken good care of his staff but admits that the overall situation in the industry is seemed gloomy.

### Yasir Nawaz - Chakkar

The director and actor Yasir Nawaz is also waiting with his film Chakkar, starring Neelam Muneer and Ahsan in leads. He says that everyone who has their film ready is disturbed about the current situation but he also think that the people who have authority



over the industry including government are not serious about this profession.

“They think that film making is a side business of producers. Until and unless the mainstream producers, distributors take it seriously, we cannot prosper as industry and film making will remain a hobby of directors and producers, not a full time profession.”

Nawaz’s film was stopped due to the lockdowns after Covid, which also put a burden on him.

Asked what he thinks will happen if the cinemas remain closed for another year, Yasir hopes the rough patch will be over by the end of this year.

“I have talked to many people. They are assuming cinemas will be reopened by November or December but if the same continues for another one and half year, they’ll start to lose hope and pack it up. Cinema owners are waiting till the end of this year, and then they will convert their properties into plazas and other projects/business.”

Asked if he would he go for a digital release, Yasir said, “Film making is a passion especially for directors and actors. We do it for bigger screens and want our films in cinema halls. As far as releasing them on TV and other digital platforms is concerned, I have been directing dramas for last 25 years, so why to make films.

“In India, as there is an established regular film industry, they can think about going for digital and OTT

platforms. In Pakistan, we don’t have many options like these. So, producers who have completed their films will wait for the cinemas to reopen.”

## Saqib Khan - Ghabrana Nahin Hai

Saqib Khan is a well-known name in drama industry. His debut big screen project Ghabrana Nahin Hai starring Saba Qamar, Zahid Ahmed, and Syed Jibran is all set to be released as soon as cinemas are reopened.

Talking about what he sees for his film, he said, “When I started writing this film with Mohsin Ali back in October 2019, the landscape of cinema screens was entirely different from what it is today.

“There was a progressive rise in the number of films being made and cinema screens so we were quite hopeful of reaching out to abroad spectrum of audiences, not only in context of monetary returns but catering to an audience of more diversified taste of cinema.”

Asked if he harbours hopes of the cinemas opening up soon, Khan showed a very little hope, “Yes, Covid has turned our industry upside down, so yes definitely we are a little bit worried because it’s not the same situation and it’ll probably take another couple of years to get back to that pre-Covid point for an industry like ours.

“The situation at the moment does not seem very promising but I’m still hopeful that as soon as the cinemas reopen, we have an array of good films waiting to be released and this will definitely boost the

confidence in our audiences, producers, distributors, exhibitors and things will revert to better net soon.”

Asked what other options he sees for his film, Khan replied, “We discussed it and I and my producers are of the opinion that ideally the film is meant for the big screen. That’s how it was conceived and executed from the beginning so we are hopeful that it gets a theatrical release as soon as the cinemas reopen, though the final decision lies with the producers.”

Asked what his technical staff are doing amid this standstill, he revealed that there are no production staff in our industry who rely solely on films. “The crew and vendors related to our industry bank more on the TV and TVCs productions for their bread and butter so most of the people are just sticking to that only and surviving this phase.”

Khan agreed that film production did open

a lot of avenues for the crew and vendors but as Covid situation has hit our industry very hard, he personally know a lot of people who went out of work last year but things are getting back to normal after the resumption of TV and TV commercials.

“I guess we’ve somehow on an unconscious level learned that we’ll have to stick with TV as this is most popular medium here and film or digital platforms will not be able to supersede it unless they’re granted the freedom of expression that they enjoy in industries that we are so inspired by and aspire to be!”



# YouTube Pampers Creators with New Feature

*Pakistani YouTuber's are relishing the brand new 'Creator On the Rise' feature designed to help them expand their audiences.*



By Amna Shoaib

Pakistani YouTubers are loving the video platform's brand new 'Creator On the Rise' feature that spotlights content from selected creators.

Each week, a different creator is highlighted and featured for a full day in a new section of the YouTube Trending Tab in Pakistan with a badge that says 'Creator on the Rise'.

The feature was rolled out on 6 August 2021. A YouTube Pakistan spokesperson says any creator with over 1,000 subscribers is eligible to be featured.

"One creator will be highlighted each week", YouTube Pakistan publicists Syntax Communications said in a statement. "We'll let them know when they are featured so they can share the moment with their fans. We hope this will help the world discover inspirational new creators".

'On The Rise' creators are shortlisted based on different factors that determine their audience engagement skills such as viewers count, watch time, and subscriber growth. YouTube team is also involved in assisting eligible creators for the selection process before they are finally featured.

The feature categorises artists, gamers and

creators separately and then furthermore classifies 'On the Rise' YouTubers based on their genre such as the 'Artist on the Rise' showcases a new music video from an emerging music artist, similarly 'Creator on the Rise' highlights an emerging non-music YouTube channel and 'Gaming Creator on the Rise' spotlights emerging Gaming creators on computer and mobile devices.

Youtube Trending shows each selected artist, gamer, and creator for 24 hours. During that time, they also get a blue "Artist on the Rise" or "Creator on the Rise" badge that shows with their channel name on the Trending tab.

YouTube says content from featured creators will be rolled out to more languages in future if they are able to keep up to the standard.

YouTube is one the Internet's oldest and most popular video platform, coupled with a powerful search engine. The company has consistently worked to improve user experience and usability.

YouTube is one of the first digital media platforms to have aided aspiring artists to showcase their talent and improve their skills by linking them with a global

audience. New creators and artists emerge on YouTube every day.

"We want to share some of those creators and artists with the world to celebrate the diversity and vibrancy of YouTube and help creators and artists find their fans," says the YouTube team.

It is encouraging for YouTubers to see YouTube experimenting with different features every now and then and taking suggestions from its users to improve the quality and working of its application for the better.

It has been unofficially said that YouTube intends to test removing the numbers of dislikes a video receives to prevent its creators from getting demotivated.

YouTube is part of Google, whose stated mission is to organise the world's information and make it universally accessible and useful.

Through products and platforms like Search, Maps, Gmail, Android, Google Play, Chrome and YouTube, Google plays a meaningful role in the daily lives of billions of people globally and has become one of the most widely-known companies in the world.

# Will Hollywood Ever Outgrow Ageism?

*America's herald of every good fight seems unable or unwilling to fight this one.*



By Haider Rifaat

Hollywood abandons you once you age. You can make your mark in the entertainment industry while still young but beyond a certain age, Hollywood deems you irrelevant.

Celebrity actors like Glenn Close, Julia Roberts, Meryl Streep, Tom Hanks, Robert De Niro, and Nicole Kidman – who headline mainstream films – are veritable American royalty because of their crowd-pulling prowess. They get to lead stories because they draw large box office numbers simply for their personal allure.

Then there is the fact that each of these A-listers made their mark at a young age. They continue to rake in given their overwhelming star power. The overwhelming majority of these mature actors are white. Only a small percentage of older minority actors have stood out in Hollywood. Viola Davis, Jackie Chan, Rita Moreno, Cicely Tyson, Samuel L. Jackson, and Denzel Washington is pretty much the definitive list.

Grossly overlooked and largely relegated to supporting roles, older actors of Asian, Latino, and African-American descent have minuscule chances of leading films unlike their white counterparts. Then there is the matter of underrepresentation of ageing female artists in America.

Older male actors appear to have a

cutting-edge over their female counterparts. Maggie Gyllenhaal, for example, faced vehement rejection at the age of 37 for a film role. In a 2015 interview, Gyllenhaal, now 43, said, “There are things that are really disappointing about being an actress in Hollywood that surprise me all the time. I’m 37, and I was told recently that I was too old to play the lover of a man who was 55.”

A Hollywood producer downright rejected a 37-year-old female actor despite her immense talent while casting a 55-year-old as the male lead. The double standard is blatant to say the least.

Comedian Kathy Griffin has been at the forefront of calling out ageism for what it is. “I’ve just been told everything from ‘Female driven sitcoms don’t make as much money as male driven sitcoms’ which can’t be true,” says she. “Then I’ve had network executives tell me ‘We’re just not considering females at this time.’ I would be hearing, they like you, they’ve just decided to go younger”.

Reese Witherspoon, who was supposed to portray the famed singer-songwriter Stevie Nicks in a biopic, was told by Nicks herself that she was “too old to play her” back in 2013 when Witherspoon was 37 years old.

It is not that only male producers are in charge in major casting decisions like who

would fit the mold of a lead “hero” or “heroine.” Women too contribute to the misogynistic, ageist traditions that Hollywood needs to outgrow.

America’s entertainment industry is clearly biased against ageing women. Olivia Wilde, Elizabeth Banks and Anne Hathaway have all been targets of ageism. Older male actors get a pass and are instead regarded as debonair, hunky silver foxes. They are largely cast in key roles irrespective of their age while women have to withstand the worst ageism.

Ageism is a mere symptom of a broader problem at hand. Sexism, prejudice against minority actors, unequal pay between males and females, and enormous pay inequities suffered by minority actors are just some of the problems Hollywood is unable or unwilling to tackle. It is essential that female actors get their due share of opportunities based on constructive scripts. Talent should always precede appearance in an industry as influential as America’s.

Producers bear a responsibility to mainstream narratives that shine a light on ageism and issues that affect the older demographic. It is high time actors came together to tackle deep-rooted issues such as ageism. Not doing so would only incentivize the entertainment fraternity to continue with their subpar, reductionist ways.



# Pruning Our Entertainment Content

*How can a business model monetizing popularity be unresponsive to the audiences' preferences?*

By Gohar Imdad

Golden days are gone when families would sit together and watch Pakistani dramas. Instead, today we get to see the 'not-so-moving' storylines that seem to be inspired by Indian soap opera. What is worse is that our entertainment industry's portrayals often strap us with cultural and social values in direct contradiction with our own.

From pregnancies to feticide, from extra-conjugal undertakings to illegitimate kids and elopements, we have been exposed to different sorts and levels of ludicrous content in these dramatizations for the sake of modern entertainment. Even sacrosanct relationships are not spared.

I have seen incalculable shows where a person falls head over heels for his niece or his little girl's girlfriend or a young lady begins engaging in extramarital relations with her brother-in-law, and plots all she can to join him in marriage.

These dramatizations even show domestic help being used as objects of physical pleasure and fulfillment by their male employers.

These are a few examples of all the absurdities that we are being entertained with in the form of dramas like Khawab nagar kishezadi, Sotan, Rang Mehal, Jalan, Mujy Bhi Khuda Pe Yaqeen Hai, etc.

The inadmissible trend of forced Nikkah's is shown by Pakistani entertainment industry. Nikkah is the most blessed of bonds in a Muslim society. The terms and stipulations for nikah to be substantial are likewise very clear to even those individuals who are not knowledgeable or mindful. Nikah is truly a sensitive subject which the greater part of the Pakistani television soaps have managed to make the subject of a very uninformed discussion.

There are a couple of Pakistani dramatizations like Sammi and Udaari which offered importance to a man and a woman's consent in marriage. This consent cannot be imposed on anyone and where there is coercion, the authenticity of the nikah is problematic.

Since most of the Pakistani dramatizations touch intimate issues and they show women explicitly as the individual being referred to, there have been a great deal of



constrained nikahs in Pakistani television serials. Each time we believe that we have seen the more unfortunate, the creators and writers consider something substantially more uncommon and unpleasant.

The most upsetting component of a portion of these dramatizations has been that these constrained nikahs are seen executed with the participation of the general society. They appear to be the norm rather than the exception, and in the end everything turns out great.

In the event that these constrained nikahs appear as invalid and dangerous, just like the case with Rehail then it is entirely fine however assuming they are utilized as 'unexpected developments' there isn't anything directly about showing such circumstances.

Among the famous Pakistani dramatizations that didn't just show such circumstances yet in addition standardized constrained nikahs would be Gul-e-Rana, Begasoor, Andaz-e-Sitam, Muqaddar, and Malal-e-Yaar.

Back in the heyday of PTV when there were no private Networks in Pakistan, we had famous and effective dramatizations – maybe more than any of the blockbuster serials of today – that would have the audience glued to their screens from 8 to 9 pm every day. Dramas like Tanhaaiyan, Alpha Bravo Charlie, Aanch, Dasht, Aroosa, Dhuwaan, Sitara aur Mehrunnisa, Marvi, Des Pardes, and Bandhan are few of the famous ones from that time.

Such was the allure of these shows that they were seen and liked in Pakistan as well as abroad. As far as I am concerned, this is

adequate proof that even while remaining inside our social and cultural standards, we can deliver content that is loved by a broad audience.

By following blindly in the footsteps of global media, we are purposely obliterating our own culture and identity. This fixation with something that doesn't concern us – to the extent our social qualities and culture are concerned – should cease at once since it affects and influences the mindset of our younger generation.

The media business should understand the effect such things can have on our citizenry. Every one of those related to this industry has a gigantic obligation on their shoulders to patch their ways for a better society.

On the other hand, since the Pandora's box has been opened, it won't be easy to fix the problem rapidly. We as consumers of entertainment need to understand that it is in our grasp whether to permit the media to control our brains, insights, and eventually our way of life. It is a fundamental duty for the audience – the adult class of the majority who are sufficiently experienced to discern good from bad – to tell media outlets what is worthy and what isn't.

All things considered, media content depends on what watchers need to see. So if viewers voice their interests passionately enough, on the off chance that they blacklist certain channels or certain projects the appraisals will undoubtedly drop.

The entertainment industry can thus be influenced through their very business model to listen to the consumers and tailor their content according to their wastes and wishes: Ratings being synonymous with income, content producers will inevitably feel beholden to what the consumers want and what they do not want.

# Where Have all the Comedy Writers Gone?

*Pakistanis are suckers for comedy and TV channels will do anything for ratings. Why then this tragic drought of comic content?*



By Benazir Mehdi

**Y**attay gattay, yattay gattay, yattay gattay! This has no meaning but few decades back this was a dialogue used everywhere and most of the Pakistani television viewers of 70s and 80s still remember this dialogue and obviously the character Ismail Tara played. It was the era of Fifty-Fifty, the most famous comedy show of Pakistan's television history. Its characters, situations, and dialogues were all the rage back in the day.

That was the time when Pakistan television was the only source of entertainment for the whole family and viewers were never disappointed. Plays of PTV were for all age groups and every segment of the society and writers and drama producers always kept this in their minds.

Small wonder we still remember comedy characters with a specific dialogue in all PTV dramas of that time. We still discuss Kaka Manna of Atta ul Haq Qasmi's Shab Deg, Direct Hawaladar of Andhera ujala, Jawadd Ji of Khawaja and Son, and my name is Rambo Rambo John Rambo of Guesthouse.

Pakistan television still occasionally re-telecasts these daramas from time to time and viewers never relish them on every occasion.

But that was another century and another era altogether. Times they're a changing. Emergence of private TV channels and

production houses took this drama industry to a peak of commercialism. Dramas, dramas, and dramas everywhere. A new darama every hour but one thing misses or lacks is strong, catchy entertainment and specifically light, situational comedy and comedy characters to be remembered for long.

New generation only knows Momo from Bulbulay, running for almost a decade now with even TV channels like Geo repeating its decade old comedy sitcom Nadanian and it still gets a rating. That shows viewers want to watch comedy but it is not there for them on darama channels.

When we speak with people who are responsible for content on entertainment channels they said there is a scarcity of good comedy writers. There are hardly any comedy writers as to create a comedy and to write comic stuff is not easy, especially when you have to create this content on regular basis.

Although it is relatively easy to produce sitcoms, the lack of good comedy content is a hurdle while there are a number of writers who are writing stories of family controversies, which is much easier but still there are hardly any comedy characters in these family daramas.

Even the two popular sitcoms of two major entertainment channels Bulbulay and

Nadanian have the same writer, hence the inevitable similarities despite different situations and characters.

We also see comedy turning to news shows might be to fulfill viewers thrust and almost every news TV channel running a talk show with stage actors and comedians and these shows are successfully getting huge ratings.

Lack of comic content on entertainment channels has also shifted viewers to social media platforms like YouTube and TikTok. YouTube channels with comic content attract huge followings. TikTok owes its huge popularity in Pakistan primarily to the user-generated comic content.

and characters like Bajis, Nasreen, and Zaid Ali have millions of subscribers between them and their videos are always trending. New comic social media stars are emerging every day. Old PTV plays we discussed above get views in many millions on YouTube.

But the question remains if young individual YouTubers and TikTokers can create quality comic content consistently on shoestring budgets, why can't the mainstream entertainment channels do it with their huge budgets?

When will we meet the next Kaka Manna or Direct Hawaladar? When will we hear our next yattay gattay?





## BOOKING OPEN E & F EXECUTIVE BLOCK

7 MARLA PLOTS  
6,500,000

10 MARLA PLOTS  
8,500,000

1 KANAL PLOTS  
13,500,000

### THANKS FOR YOUR TRUST



0340-1407777



0308-9555888



0348-1119994



0300-0172442



UAN: 0340 140 7777

Office# 66-67, 1st Floor, Diamond Mall & Residency,  
Main Gulberg Greens Expressway, Islamabad, Pakistan.

# HBL



## Closer to home with just a click



### ROSHAN DIGITAL ACCOUNT

دور رہ کر بھی پاس

An Initiative of State Bank of Pakistan



**ebanc Roshan Digital Account** is a unique opportunity for **Overseas Pakistanis\*** to digitally open an account in Pakistan with HBL.

Enjoy a wide range of benefits and investment opportunities including:

- Account Transfers
- Naya Pakistan Certificates
- Real Estate Investments
- HBL Islamic HomeFinance
- Utility Bill Payments
- HBL Roshan Apni Car
- Stock Market Investments
- HBL Roshan Samaaji Khidmat

For details of additional benefits and investment opportunities, visit [www.hbl.com/ebancroshandigitalaccount](http://www.hbl.com/ebancroshandigitalaccount)

Scan  
QR Code to  
apply online



Terms and Conditions apply.

\*along with Resident Pakistanis with declared assets abroad.