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15th - 31st October 2021

Pandora Papers
Failed to Create Ripples

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In a first fight between Religious Sects

IMF & Dollar Value
Rainy days looming on Pakistan Economy

Much Ado About Nothing



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CELEBRATING A DECADE OF SECURE AND RELIABLE CLOUD SERVICES



CONTENTS

Editorial

No surprises by M. Ziauddin – **Page 04**

City Notes

Getting squash into cricket by M.A. Niazi – **Page 05**

Politics

Minding the Minders by Umer Farooq – **Page 06**

A smudge on the same page by Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 08**

The Dirty Video Games by Khalid Wasim – **Page 10**

The PML-N's Eternal Dilemma by Ahmad Waleed – **Page 12**

Countdown to Showdown Over Electoral Reform by Zain Rihat – **Page 13**

Foreign Affairs

People Suffer as Taliban Struggle to Bring Normalcy to Afghanistan by Haq Nawaz Khan – **Page 16**

Is Afghanistan the Newest Theatre of Sunni-Salafi War? By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel – **Page 18**

Taliban Retain Kabul's 10,000 Municipal Employees by Zarghoon Shah – **Page 20**

Daesh Finance Minister Sami Al-Jaburi Arrested in Iraq – TTI Report – **Page 21**

Outmached and Outplayed, Then and Now by Malik Zahoor – **Page 22**

Investigation

The Birth Pangs of Digital Economy by Azeem Waqas – **Page 24**

A Law to Let the Big Fish Off the Hook by Asadullah – **Page 26**

Putting Pakistan Railways Back On the Rails by Muhammad Zahid Rifat – **Page 30**

History

Mankind's Final Destiny by Azmat M Saqib – **Page 32**

Economy

Pakistan & IMF: Peak Geoeconomics by Mehtab Haider – **Page 34**

Power Sector in the Dock by Khalique Ahmad – **Page 36**

After Tough Times, Tougher Times by Javed Mahmood – **Page 38**

Health

After a Pandemic, a Co-Epidemic by Noor Aftab – **Page 40**

Climate Change

Why is Humanity's Fight Against Climate Change Under-Resourced? By Ahmer Kureishi – **Page 43**

Courting Climate Disaster by Sara Hayat – **Page 46**

Sports

Fireworks at National T20 Cup as Prep for T20 World Cup by Ali Abdullah – **Page 49**

Entertainment

Pak-Afghan Duo Sings for the Forlorn Singers of Afghanistan by Hasan Kazmi – **Page 50**

Film Industry Bailout Must Cover Producers, says Adnan Siddiqui by Kaukab Jahan – **Page 52**

Obituary

Pakistan's King of Comedy Dies at 61 by Sarfraz Raja – **Page 54**

Dr Khan planned to challenge MDCAT hours before his death – **Page 55**

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No surprises

By M. Ziauddin

The International Consortium of Investigative Journalists comprising hundreds of journalists are said to have spent 18 months trawling through the nearly 1.2 crore files to come up on October 3, 2021 with what are being called the Pandora Papers.

However, the big picture is not particularly surprising. Tax evasion or avoidance via offshore “havens” is hardly a novelty, and obtaining overseas properties is routine for those who have the resources.

How they came by the tens of millions, or occasionally billions of dollars required for such “investments” is a different story. Bribes, kickbacks and “money laundering” tend to be frowned upon, but it is all good if the monumental balances were racked up via the routine exploitation that sustains the capitalist order.

Panama Papers had led to a regime change in Pakistan. What will happen after the Pandora Papers leak? Not much, many believe.

Indeed, by comparison, the Pandora Papers investigation is bigger in size and revelations about politicians and public officials are also far more than what had come to public attention following the publication of Panama Papers.

And compared to 400 Pakistanis named by Panama Papers owning off-shore companies, the Pandora Papers have named as many as 700. Moreover, the earlier set of papers made public on April 3, 2016 had not mentioned any prominent politician, except some family members of the then Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif. The new set of papers have named as many as 7 prominent Pakistani politicians, most belonging to the ruling coterie.

However, since not a single prominent opposition political leader has been mentioned in the Pandora papers, except one small time PPP leader, the chances are, except for occasional official promises to investigate all the 700 named including the prominent politicians belonging to the government and sending those found guilty to jail, not much is expected to happen.

Truth be told, even after the publication of Panama Papers nothing out of the ordinary had happened, except loud promises that investigations would be conducted against the 400 named and those found guilty would

be made to cough up the loot and sent to jail. Since Nawaz Sharif's name was not listed in the Panama Papers, no media trial of his was taking place as well.

But all hell broke loose when on June 6, an exclusive front page report published in Dawn, later rendered infamous as Dawn-leaks, detailed a civil-military tussle during a high powered security meeting over the arrest or otherwise of non-state actors that were allegedly indulging in terror activities in and outside the country and some of whom were already under UN and/or US sanctions.

The said report had presented one of the two parties involved in the tussle not in the most ideal light prompting the affected one to hit back. Using the mention of his family members in the Panama Papers as a justifiable pretext a wounded establishment had the then Prime Minister ousted from his office through the courts which were clearly fixed. Following the regime change the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) arrested almost all the top PMLN and PPP leaders accusing them of using public offices to loot the public exchequer. Three years hence these operations look more like witch-hunts than anything substantive.

The ICIJ stated that key members of Prime Minister Imran Khan's inner circle, including cabinet ministers, their families and major financial backers had secretly owned an array of companies and trusts holding millions of dollars of hidden wealth.

However, since the government has remained on the right side of the establishment over the last three years and the ousted PMLN leadership has continued to be vociferously critical of the perceived political hegemony of the establishment, the latter seems to be in no mood to disrupt the ruling coalition by getting substantive investigation started against the named cabinet members and their families.

Meanwhile, top investigation agencies have been tasked to investigate those individuals. The agencies will also seek help from the provincial revenue departments and Nadra.

But meaningful consequences seldom flow from such investigations. It is particularly embarrassing, though, when purported crusaders against corruption are caught up in such conundrums.

According to the leaked documents, Shaukat Tarin, the country's finance minister, and members of his family owned four offshore firms. Tariq Fawad Malik, a financial adviser who handled the paperwork for the companies, told the ICIJ that the companies were set up by the Tarin family with the intention of investing in a bank with Saudi business connections. But the deal did not proceed, Mr. Malik said. The leaked documents also suggest that Chaudhry Moonis Elahi, the minister for water resources, pulled out of making planned investments through offshore tax havens after he was warned the investment would be reported to the country's tax authorities. PTI's Senator Faisal Wawda, son of PML-N's Ishaq Dar, PPP's Sharjeel Memon, the family of Minister for Industries and Production Khushro Bakhtiar, and PTI leader Abdul Aleem Khan, among others — have alleged links to offshore companies. Reacting to the investigative report, Aleem Khan took to Twitter and said that he has nothing to hide as he has declared all his assets to the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR). Ali Dar — the son of PML-N's Ishaq Dar — also took to Twitter and shared the answers he had sent to senior investigative journalist Umar Cheema. "I had replied with a detailed account of companies, which were perfectly legal and were made for legal purposes. I have settled in the UAE since graduation," he wrote.

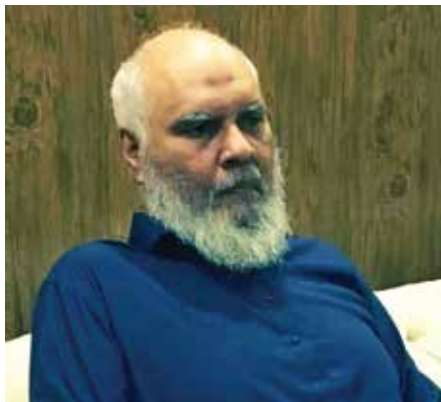
Some analysts believe that the revelations brought by the investigation will not have a substantial impact on the current political order. Many don't think there are major political consequences for Pakistani politics. Indeed, one does not see any serious implications or threats to the Khan Government or Cabinet after the leaks. This is no crisis for the government. Not even close.

In Pakistan the best way to postpone action or defer an issue is to create the illusion of accountability by announcing a high-level commission. And this isn't the first commission announced by this government for such investigations.

Also, taking the cue, within days after the leaks, the media lost interest in the story. Some believe that the accountability process would hardly ruffle the feathers of military officials named in the Pandora Papers.

CITY NOTES: Getting squash into cricket

By M.A. Niazi



The New Zealand head coach has said that the team didn't decide to pull out of the tour. It seems the next step is for New Zealand to say that the tour wasn't cancelled at all. Or maybe they'll have the decency to admit that the tour was cancelled, but blame Imran Khan. In fact, they may say that he called his New Zealand counterpart to tell her that he was doing so. It's enough to make Imran find out her corruption.

I hope there's no corruption involved in the decision to make Tania Mallick the head of women's cricket. Her main qualification is that she has been women's badminton champion. I don't know the connection between women's badminton and cricket, but I do know that Ameer Bi was once All-India badminton champion. And she was the mother of the Mohammad brothers, four of whom played for Pakistan, two (Heer Bianif and Mushtaq) captaining it. With motherly partiality, she said that her fifth son, Raees was the best batsmen of them all, even though he was the only one who never played Test cricket. Or maybe he

was, for while sportswomen become mothers, they're usually honest, even if it's about another game.

But apart from that link, if we're going to have sports cross-fertilizing each other, maybe squash great Jehangir Khan can be inveigled as batting coach, and javeliner Nadeem Arshad, who almost won a medal at the recent Olympics, can be made bowling coach.

You might remember that Rameez 'Rambo' Raja began his stint as PCB President by blowing away the New Zealand team. He had also got the coaches to resign, and installed people of his own choosing. Now he's made PCB Chief Executive Officer Waseem Khan to step down. No replacement has been named yet, but maybe a former hockey captain like Kaleemullah would probably fit the bill.

Rambo cannot be held accountable for Inzamamul Haq's heart attack, though both he and Imran should think about how someone very much their junior has had a heart attack. True, neither has been as hearty a trencherman as Inzamam, but abstention from greasy food does not cover for age. And Inzamam was younger than both.

Anyway, maybe the PCB needs a female CEO. Why should female sportsmen be restricted to Women's cricket? I mean, in the recent Iceland elections, they almost elected a female majority legislature. They did, actually, according to the first count, but after a recount were down to 30 of 63 seats.

Elections in Germany meant that not only were they no longer to have a female Chancellor in Angela Merkel, who has held office since 2005 (making her the longest serving Chancellor since Helmut Kohl), but they've seen a change in party. Elections in Canada and Russia have seen no change. Imran would like elections like those in 2023. Perhaps not as in Canada, where he PM asked for a majority. Before the poll he headed a minority government, supported from outside by the LDP, which is headed by a Sikh, which sort of makes Canada the nearest thing they've got to Khalistan.

Ahead of our elections, though, there's been dirty work done at the crossroads. The UK's National Crime Agency has applied for the unfreezing of various accounts of the Sharif family, not having found any evidence of money laundering. All is explained by Mian Nawaz's presence in London. He must have bribed the NCA investigators. When Shehzad Akbar, the head of the Assets Recovery Unit, held a press conference, he didn't mention he most telling evidence of Shahbaz's corruption: his face. Not to mention that he had never won a World Cup for Pakistan.

The NCA had not heard the proof that Fawad Chaudhry presented that the Avenfield flats were the results of corruption on the Motorway. Well, nobody else heard the proof either. Which is that Shehbaz Sharif didn't build a cancer hospital. The piece of evidence that sets the capstone on the proof of his corruption was that he didn't eat organic food. Not to forget that all his children were born in wedlock.

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Minding the Minders

Time to probe the nation's anti-crime apparatus.

By Umer Farooq

The difficulties with catching the thieves of public money in Pakistan start with a basic definitional problem. There is no precise definition of financial corruption based on political consensus in our society.

What is more, the most basic questions surrounding the issue are missing from the political discourse that is taking place in Pakistani society. Nobody is talking about whether only those responsible for managing public funds can be accused of financial corruption.

There is no definite moral position on whether a private party or businessman evading tax should be chased and prosecuted as ruthlessly as a former prime minister has been hounded.

Nor is there any clarity on the admissibility or rather obligation of bringing to book somebody known to finance an incumbent prime minister's party but found engaged in unsavory business practices.

Finally, nobody is saying whether lavish and overly generous bestowing of state resources on officials of state departments and institutions should be counted as corruption of the darkest tint.

The Pakistani political discourse is completely devoid of an intellectual capacity to bring forward a definition of financial corruption that could encompass all the facets of financial wrongdoing and exploitation of public money and resources going on in Pakistani society.

Take the example of two key financial backers of Khan's PTI party named in the Pandora Papers: The disgraced banker Arif Naqvi and prominent businessman Tariq Shafi.

Naqvi, a major donor to Khan's 2013 election campaign, transferred ownership of three luxury apartments, a country estate and a suburban London property in the UK, to an offshore trust operated by Deutsche Bank in 2017, the files show.

Naqvi was subsequently charged by US prosecutors with more than USD 400 million in fraud. Based these days in the UK, he is on bail facing extradition to the US.

Shafi, another large PTI donor, was shown to hold USD 215 million through offshore companies, according to the Pandora Papers.

These glaring instances of apparent wrongdoing so close to the corridors of power are likely to elude scrutiny precisely because they are so close to the corridors of power. In our country, what makes wrongdoing dangerous also makes it untouchable.

Is it not a serious offence for somebody to stash away their ill-gotten wealth in offshore companies, while offering



money to the Prime Minister's party during elections? Apparently, not, at least in our part of the world, witness our political discourse in the wake of the damning disclosures.

There is a lot of frivolous ruckus over Pandora Papers but not a feather has been ruffled by what seems to be real sleaze, not an eyelid batted over it.

The problem may be partly rooted in the fact that Pakistani investigators ostensibly lack the expertise to investigate and prosecute white collar and financial crime. They are simply not equipped to unravel the intricate webs that underpin shady tycoons' empires.

For example, it will be an impossible task to link, in a Pakistani court of law, Arif Naqvi with the money he funneled into Prime Minister Imran Khan's 2018 parliamentary electoral campaign.

Not only do we lack in expertise, we also lack in moral courage and enthusiasm to investigate, especially when it comes to investigating those on the right side of the high and mighty.

The past four years have seen prosecution and arrests in the name of accountability, but the brunt of the campaign has fallen on those on the wrong side of the military or on the wrong side of Imran Khan's government.

This blinkered accountability puts a question mark on the integrity of institutions vested with the powers to investigate financial wrongdoing by Pakistani citizens, living abroad or within the country.

Pandora Papers—an investigation effort of hundreds of leading journalists from across the world—might further expose Pakistani State's and its institutions' moral bankruptcy. Pakistani state machinery has been using anti-corruption slogans to carry out political witch-hunt.

The revelations contained in thousands of files of Pandora papers will further expose this fact of Pakistani politics—you only have to be on the wrong side of powers



that to be accused, chased, harassed and prosecuted of financial wrongdoing or corruption.

Take for example the case of Moonis Ellahi – the scion of an elite political family of Punjab once close to General Musharraf and now in alliance with Prime Minister Khan.

The ICIJ investigation alleges Elahi, Khan's cabinet minister, sought to invest USD 5.6 million from an alleged loan scandal into a trust through international financial services provider Asiaciti Trust in January 2016.

Asiaciti Trust accepted Elahi as a client a month later, despite a risk assessment commissioned by the company identifying his involvement in "several corrupt land development projects" during his time as a provincial politician in Punjab, Pakistan's most populous province.

In 2007, authorities found that the Bank of Punjab, owned by the then Elahi-led provincial government, had reportedly issued USD 608 million in unsecured loans, many to companies owned by the families or friends of political leaders or to the bank's own directors.

The Bank soon found the loans unrecoverable, and was promptly rescued by a fat bailout package from the provincial government. The USD 5.6m transaction proposed by Elahi to Asiaciti Trust was allegedly made from the proceeds of those Bank of Punjab loans, ICIJ says.

Should these disclosures not lead to a storm in the power corridors? Why have the country's premiere anti-crime agencies not jump into action? Why has not the apex court taken a suo motu notice?

We know nothing in this vein will happen, and we know why : The power structure of the country doesn't view Moonis and his influential family as a threat to the political order prevailing in our society.

Every Pakistani knows the Prime Minister's promise to investigate every citizen named in Pandora Papers is nothing but a cruel joke. How can he investigate his alleged benefactors? As for those who installed Khan in power, they will happily go along.

Pandora Papers also offer a rare glimpse into the wealth held by former members of our all-powerful military. The Papers show that in 2007, the wife of Lieutenant-General Shafaat Ullah Khan, a prominent general and key ally of then-President General Musharraf, acquired an apartment worth USD 1.2 million through an offshore transaction.

Shah denies any wrongdoing in responses to the ICIJ. On the other hand, no matter how many plots he is allocated in DHAs across the country, a retired army officer cannot afford to buy a USD 1.2 million apartment in London.

Major-General Nusrat Naeem, a former director-general of counterintelligence at Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), owned a company in the British Virgin Islands that was registered in 2009, shortly after he retired.

Naeem was later accused of USD 1.7 million in fraud related to the

purchase of a steel mill. The case was eventually dropped and he denies any wrongdoing.

Other military-linked Pakistanis Pandora Papers unearth include two sons of former Pakistan Air Force chief Abbas Khattak, who in 2010 registered an offshore company in British Virgin Islands.

The case of former military officials acquiring financial and land interests in foreign countries should be investigated with particular vigor by state machinery.

Pakistani state is never short of words hammering into popular imagination that the country is facing fifth generation warfare and particular segments of the society are particularly vulnerable to being used as a tool.

Living abroad with their huge financial interests in London and elsewhere, these former military officials wield considerable influence back home and are certainly vulnerable to influence of hostile intelligence agencies.



Also, the Pakistani political elite will be doing a service to the country if they include the overly generous bestowing of state financial, natural and land resources to officials of the state machinery. It constitutes bribery and fuels the dynamic of corruption in the society.

State officials getting these resources as part of their employment perks could be counted as institutionalized or legalized corruption.

These financial, natural, and land resources belong to the ordinary people of Pakistan and they should collectively be beneficiaries of these resources. These resources must in no case be distributed among a particular class like peanuts.

Finally, no political witch-hunt should be tolerated in our society unless this part of state machinery's function is brought under the net of accountability; we must watch the watchdogs, and we must mind our minders.



A smudge on the same page



By Hammad Ghaznavi

Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Establishment have enjoyed an extremely cordial and cozy relationship for a long time, especially the last three years – perhaps the longest civil-military honeymoon in the history of the country. Both sides made no bones about it and kept pushing the ‘one page’ story right through this period. More or less, it was a bump-free ride, an unprecedented achievement in a political system marred with civil-military tensions spread over 70 years. All things ephemeral, however, come to an end one day. Has the day arrived? Has the serpent of mistrust raised its ugly head to sink its fangs into this enviable relationship? Does the love story have a tragic ending? Questions galore!

It is, apparently, one key appointment of the DG of a premier intelligence agency that has brought the present strain in the civil-military relationship to the public attention. It is, however, not just another appointment. The DG is a part of the most powerful ‘troika’, supposed to be ruling the country. The appointment, many argue, will have a decisive impact on the members and future of the troika itself.

It all started, in brief, in the first week of October, when after the PM-COAS meeting, some crucial army postings and transfers were announced by the ISPR. Many of these were considered an internal matter of the

institution. But one appointment of the DG ISI that has traditionally been announced, not by the ISPR but by the PM office first, raised antennas. The PM office stayed mum. In fact, the next day there was a meeting of the National Security Committee wherein the ‘former’ DG participated as the ‘present’ DG of the intelligence agency. The two power centers had, to put it mildly, a difference of opinion on the issue; it became common knowledge. It is not important how the matter is resolved, who has budged and who has prevailed. The message of the tiff is that mistrust has crept into the hitherto romance. It has happened in the past. The infamous tweet of the ISPR chief, ‘Rejected’, in April 2017 was later withdrawn but the mistrust between the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and the Establishment stayed.

As a recent outcome, a breakthrough seems to be on the cards to end days of rumours and gossiping flooding the social media fueling the impression of a deepening crisis engulfing the country. The unaddressed speculations around a rumoured deadlock between the civil and military leaderships became a source of uncertainty for the stock market over the last few days as well as the political arena.

Sources now insist that there is no deadlock and an amicable resolution is likely soon. Top figures of the civil and military

leaderships met late Monday (Oct 11) to find a mutually-agreeable way forward.

The ‘Hybrid System’ is a term coined by the Opposition to define the present political dispensation. Put simply, it is a system of governance wherein the ruling party and the establishment, hand in hand, run the affairs of the state, with the former serving as the junior partner. Imran Khan’s detractors dub him a ‘puppet’, pointing to his presumed role as a junior partner. The ‘difference of opinion’ on the abovementioned appointment hence came as a surprise for many. Why the PM this time decided, unlike many such situations in the last three years, to stay firm on his stance? His stakes seem a little too high this time around, or so he thought at least.

The Establishment, it is believed, has played an important role in Pakistan’s political history. During almost the half of country’s existence, it has ruled Pakistan directly. While during the remaining half it has influenced, many agree, various key internal and external policy decisions. Even many of our popular political leaders, including Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif, were introduced and patronized by the Establishment. Both later fell out of the Establishment’s favour though. Even a handpicked Prime Minister Muhammad Khan Junejo had ‘difference of opinion’



with dictator Ziaul Haq, leading to his ouster from the prime minister office. History testifies that the seat of Prime Minister and powers emanating from it, make power sharing difficult and leads to a collision path with the Establishment, especially the popular PMs who, sooner or later, have to face the electorate. Is Imran Khan an exception?

How did Imran Khan become a blue eyed boy of the Establishment? Abdul Sattar Edhi and Hakim Muhammad Saeed, the two most respected philanthropists of the country, trace its origins to the 90s. PTI's mammoth jalsa at Minare Pakistan in October 2011, political commentators argue, was the first open sign of the Establishment's support for Mr Khan. Insiders insist that it was the passage of 18th amendment, cleansing the constitution of almost all the amendments introduced by martial law dictators that convinced the Establishment that it had to rid the system of the two major political parties of the country, PML-N and PPP. The rest is history.

It is perhaps the first time in the country's history that the Establishment has narrowed down its options to literally one party. Otherwise, the powerful quarters always had at least two options, pitting them against each other when need arose. The politics of 90s was a classic example when Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto were encouraged to dislodge each other from power twice. The Charter of Democracy signed by Benazir and Sharif in 2006 vowed not to be part of any conspiracy to oust each other's government.

With Imran Khan coming into power, the stage was set to further decimate the opposition through NAB and other government agencies. The NAB cases, jails and bails kept the opposition busy for three years. The opposition was in disarray during the Imran rule, to say the least. Meanwhile, the dissenting voices in the judiciary, media, Election Commission, etc were managed by the 'same page' players. It was believed that the 'miscreants' had been harnessed and the next couple of elections can return 'favourable' results, and there was no need for any other political option. This 'impeccable' plan seems to have countered roadblocks.

Inflation has proven to be the decisive factor, creating a general wave of dissatisfaction with the PTI government. Prices of essential commodities, food items, fuel, electricity, LNG, and medicines have left the masses gasping for breath. The government's indecision on going to the IMF is responsible for our various financial ills, many believe. Exporting wheat and sugar and then importing it at higher rates is considered scandalous by many. There is bad governance and back to back scandals, wheat, sugar, LNG, medicines, Rawalpindi Ring Road, etc, to name a few.

Nawaz Sharif, an astute politician that he is, decided to fully exploit this wave of anger. Perhaps the bravest and most risky decision of his political career, he tried to divert the public anger towards the 'selectors'. Last year in the PDM Gujranwala jalsa, he named the Chief and that proved to be the beginning of a regular onslaught against the 'Chief Selector'. At least among

his support base, Sharif succeeded in putting the blame of misgovernance and inflation on Imran's backers. It all was viewed with great concern in Rawalpindi. Pakistan under Imran has gone paupers and the colossal failure is being attributed to the signatories of the same page. Also, looking at the geo political situation, dollars aren't coming any time soon. Is it time to go back to the drawing board? It seems the Establishment has no plan B – confusion worse confounded.

It is against this background that the present state of Imran-Establishment relations can be understood. True, Mr Khan came to power with the blessings of powers-that-be. But he is not Shaukat Aziz. He certainly is, at present, one of the two most popular political leaders of the country. As a major political player, he is trying to control the political chess board by moving his pieces. Nawaz Sharif and his political heir Maryam seem to know why Mr Khan was keen on a certain appointment. Hence, Maryam Nawaz moved the Islamabad High Court, naming the un-namable, to make Mr Khan's choice even more controversial.

Who is going to be the next COAS, a position falling vacant in November 2022? Will the incumbent COAS be interested in another extension? Who Imran Khan wants to head the most powerful institution in the country when the next general election approaches? These are tricky questions. And possibly the three most powerful people in the land have a 'difference of opinion' on these questions. The Khan-Establishment relations, to conclude, have well past their zenith.





The Dirty Video Games

Who makes and spreads such videos – and to what end?



By Khalid Wasim

Politics in Pakistan has always been like Hollywood and Bollywood movies full of thrill, action, suspense, conspiracies and drama – and just like showbiz personalities, the country's politicians as well as judges are often caught on tape engaging in scandalous or fraudulent activities.

Such incidents are reported in other countries of the world as well and several powerful figures have even had to quit their offices after video evidence of their immoral activities surfaced. In Pakistan, however, there has been no such example and every leaked video or audio has been dubbed as fake and tampered by those found involved in any wrongdoing.

Former Sindh governor Muhammad Zubair of the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), who is also the official spokesperson for party's supreme leader Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz, is the latest victim of a leaked video scandal.

The video footage comprising various clips, apparently made from a mobile phone, showing Mr Zubair engaged in sex acts with an unidentified woman went viral first on social media and later in the mainstream media.

An unknown commentator is heard in the clip alleging the former governor abused a number of women who sought his help in getting some jobs when he was the governor of the Sindh province.

The clip allegedly showing the PML-N leader in a bedroom with a blurred-out face of a woman spread like a wildfire with #ZubairUmar becoming the top trend on Pakistani Twitter and it generated a debate on the social media. Some were found discussing the authenticity of the footage and the others discussing as to how the footage was leaked and who could be behind this dirty game.

The mainstream media, which was initially in a state of quandary over the issue of airing the news about the leaked video, got an opportunity to do so when Mr Zubair himself came up with a response through his official social media account on Twitter, terming the video footage “fake and doctored” and a “new low in politics”.

Mr Zubair, who served as the Sindh governor during the previous PML-N government, said: “Whosoever is behind this has done an extremely poor and shameful act. I have served my country with honesty, integrity and commitment. Will continue to

raise my voice for betterment of Pakistan”.

Incidentally, Zubair is a brother of Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar.

Soon after the video leak, TV Anchor Gharidah Farooqi tweeted that Zubair intended to conduct a forensic audit of the video. However, there has been complete silence on the issue since.

PML-N's vice-president Maryam Nawaz very intelligently played down the incident and kept herself away from the controversy, terming it a “personal matter”, and declared in categorical terms that Zubair would continue to work as the official spokesperson for her and Nawaz Sharif.

Such private videos of anyone should not come out, she said while informally talking to reporters in Lahore days after the release of the controversial video clips, adding that those who thought that Zubair would be removed from the post of spokesperson after the video surfaced were wrong.

“The matter is between Zubair and Allah Almighty,” she said concluding her conversation on the issue, leaving no option for the reporters to discuss the matter any further.



Earlier, without elaborating, Ms Sharif had claimed that Muhammad Zubair had been “receiving threats” for a while. Although she did not name any individual or institution, her remarks were sufficient to be understood by political analysts and those who know the power politics in the country.

While defending her own act of releasing the video of the former accountability judge, Maryam said that she “doesn’t have anyone’s private video” and that the video of the judge, who later died due to Covid-19, had been made by (a PML-N loyalist) Nasir Butt and she released it as it was a “national level matter”.

In the video, the late judge could be heard confessing that “there was no evidence” of corruption against Nawaz Sharif and that he was under pressure to convict the thrice prime minister of Pakistan.

Later, the reports emerged that there was another “personal and objectionable” video of the late judge on the basis of which he was being blackmailed by certain quarters to convict Mr Sharif.

The FIA had even claimed to have arrested a person named Tariq from Karachi on charges of making the video while he was trying to flee the country. Later, the judge reportedly refuted Maryam’s claims, and accused the Sharif family of threatening and offering him a bribe in exchange for acquitting the former PM.

The video scandal compelled the Supreme Court to intervene while admitting that the scandal had damaged the judiciary’s reputation. Judge Malik was suspended pending finalization of the inquiry. Judge Malik has since died of Covid-19, and it is highly unlikely after the facts of the matter will ever come to light.

The memories are still fresh in the minds of many senior journalists and politicians about a similar leaked telephonic conversation between Lahore High Court (LHC) judge Malik Abdul Qayyum the then head of the Ehtesab Commission Senator Saifur Rehman under the second term of Nawaz Sharif government in late 1990s.

The leaked telephonic conversation had not only reflected the pressures which the judges faced while hearing the high profile cases, it had also exposed the involvement

of some elements at the institutional level as without their support, the audio tape could not have been leaked at that time when there were no smartphones in the country.

In the audio, released by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), the judge was allegedly being told by the PML-N senator to complete the trial of the corruption cases against Asif Ali Zardari at the earliest and award him a stern punishment.

The PPP had brought the tape to the surface to highlight, what it called the PML-N government’s political victimization of its leaders, particularly Asif Ali Zardari, who had been in jail in connection with corruption cases.

More recently, just before the Senate elections earlier this year, a leaked video had gone viral on social and main media showing a number of Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) MPAs from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) distributing and receiving cash as bribe and for horse-trading during the 2018 Senate elections.

It was reported that the then KP Assembly speaker, Asad Qaiser, and former provincial chief minister Pervez Khattak, were also present when the money was allegedly being distributed among the lawmakers. Both Qaiser and Khattak denied the allegations.

Qaiser tweeted that neither the place shown in the “horse-trading” video was the Speaker House, Peshawar, nor he had to do anything with the matter. In the tweet, Qaiser said PM Imran Khan had informed him in 2018 about the buying and selling of votes and the entire party had decided to take action against the PTI MPAs, involved in the matter.

At the time of the surfacing of these series of video clips, a number of legal experts had suggested that criminal proceedings under the Elections Act 2017 could be initiated against those seen in the video and they could also face disqualification under Articles 62 and 63 of the Constitution. However, once again, nothing happened.

Also in 2019, some leaked video clips showing National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Chairman retired Justice Javed Iqbal allegedly involved in lewd behaviour with a woman, also went viral on social and main media. The woman in the video was

later identified as Tayyaba, the wife of a person accused in a NAB case.

The opposition parties demanded a thorough probe into the matter after the NAB chairman came out with a clarification, claiming that the said woman was trying to blackmail him as her husband was in jail on charges of corruption.

In April, the National Assembly saw a rumpus following a noisy protest by the opposition when Minister of State for the Parliamentary Affairs Ali Muhammad Khan informed the house that the Prime Minister Office had “dropped” the complaint of the woman alleging harassment to her and her family by the NAB chairman. The opposition lodged a strong protest when Speaker Asad Qaiser refused to refer the matter to a house committee.

The opposition was agitated over the remarks of the minister who had not only opposed the demand for referring the matter to the committee but also alleged that the opposition members were raising the issue only to pressurise NAB which was hearing corruption cases against their leadership.

PPP MNA from Karachi Abdul Qadir Patel had put a written question asking about the status of the complaint that had been posted on the Pakistan Citizen Portal by Tayyaba against the NAB chairman.

“Chairman NAB is harassing me and my family”, reads the woman’s complaint. “He is making fake cases against me and my husband just because I didn’t make any relation with him. NAB is threatening me.

“I am a law student. How he disrespects a woman like this. He is a morally ill person. I have all videos and audio recordings against him, I am attaching some screenshots of videos”.

The PPP MNA had disclosed that the complaint had been filed by the woman on 10 May 2019 and the controversial audio and videos of the NAB chairman went viral on media on May 17. However, the issue died down on its own.

It seems that such videos and audios had been released to malign the politicians and to put pressure on the judges to seek favourable decisions. There is a need to hold a thorough investigations of all the cases to unmask those behind these scandals.



The PML-N's Eternal Dilemma

No end in sight for internecine wrangling for primacy within Pakistan's largest political party.

By Ahmad Waleed

To be or not to be is still the question for the party of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. This narrative or that? Survive to fight or fight to survive? The Pakistan Muslim League – Nawaz (PML-N) remains on the horns of what looks increasingly like its existential dilemma.

The gridlock between the party's pro-appeasement and pro-confrontation blocs has persisted despite several rounds of debates lately in order to reach a consensus on a single narrative for the next general elections. Apparently, it was all in vain.

The very recent diatribe of Maryam Nawaz against the outgoing spymaster Lt. Gen. Faiz Hameed for his alleged 'role' in making Avenfield case against her and her father Nawaz Sharif has landed the party's 'reconciliation' group in an uncomfortable position.

She made these assertions in her application filed with the Islamabad High Court to seek annulment of Avenfield case where she and her father along with her husband Safdar were sentenced.

In her application she says this has proved that her case is 'politically engineered'. "Not only that General Faiz Hameed made the case, but [he] also ran it and had us convicted through the court of Judge Bashir," she asserted.

Her direct attack on the establishment has provided her rivals with enough ammo to take her to task for what they call 'undermining and weakening' the national security institutions. The government ministers believe her onslaught against the feared security agency has just one aim – to serve the agenda of the enemy countries which have launched an international campaign to malign Pakistan.

Maryam's hard-hitting press conference was not received well by her own party cadres as infighting has raged to new levels where both the groups have seemingly refused to budge on their stance.

Recently, PML-N MNA Mian Javed Latif created an uproar when he took the battle of narratives to the next level, saying there are some leaders in the party on the 'assignment' alluding to none other than PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif and Khawaja Asif who he said wanted to 'distort' the narrative of the party (respect the ballot).

In an interview to Samaa TV, he alleged that these people are on the assignment from those who do not believe in law and the Constitution. He also warned that these leaders must 'remember the fate of Chaudhry Nisar'.

Maryam Nawaz made similar remarks during a meeting where she said 'some people are afraid of those who are afraid of us'.

Close aides of Shahbaz Sharif say he took offence at these remarks and remained absent from a couple of party meetings of local leadership until his elder brother Nawaz Sharif agreed that Javed Latif be handed a show-cause notice.



However, there are reports that Javed Latif has refused to submit a reply to the show-cause served on him by the party president, Shahbaz Sharif despite a reminder. Some party leaders believe Javed Latif has a full support of Maryam Nawaz group.

Ahsan Iqbal, General Secretary of PML-N, told Dawn newspaper that a reminder has been sent to Javed Latif to respond to the show-cause notice issued by the party president. Even after months of wrangling the PML-N has failed to resolve the issues of narratives. It seems Maryam Nawaz is in no mood to abandon the stance of her father.

However, her uncle Shahbaz Sharif along with his son Hamza Shahbaz and the supporters of the narrative of avoiding confrontation with the establishment believe the party's quest for power needs a rethink.

Hamza Shahbaz embarked upon a voter mobilisation campaign after a nod from his father that he has a bright chance to grab the most coveted seat of Chief Minister in case the party comes to power after 2023 elections in Punjab.

Party insiders say Hamza was reluctant to participate in the public meeting kicked off by the senior lot of the party until he received a clear signal about his position after the next elections.

There were reports of slogans like 'chief minister Hamza Shahbaz' in most of the rallies he addressed in parts of the Southern Punjab which is considered a bit weak area of PML-N. On this count, the situation is seemingly clear for now although his father finds himself in a bind where he cannot push his own narrative strongly enough to overpower his elder brother's confrontational stance.

Although most of the party leaders believe that the infighting may hurt, the party can go on with both the narratives for next elections taking mileage of the poor governance of the incumbent PTI government. But, the top leadership will have to resolve the leadership fiasco sooner than later lest the largest party of the country fall apart.

If that comes to pass, the blame will rest entirely with the leadership.



Countdown to Showdown Over Electoral Reform

Passing the controversial electoral reform legislation through brute majority is possible but will it be viable?



By Zain Rihat

Treasury and opposition parties in Pakistan's parliament are heading towards an ugly showdown as Prime Minister Imran Khan's is intent on pushing through controversial electoral reform legislation.

The government seems set on instating the use of Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) in time for the next general election. On the other hand, the opposition parties, especially the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) and Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), are determined to oppose to the proposed election laws that will also accord on overseas Pakistanis the right to vote in a general election.

Last week, Prime Minister Imran Khan again vowed polling would be conducted through EVMs in the 2023 general election come what may. Presiding over a meeting of the core committee of the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), the Prime Minister also said that overseas Pakistanis would certainly cast their ballots in the next general election in the country.

On 29 September, the PTI government moved one step closer to introduction of much talked about Electronic Voting Machines and giving right of vote to overseas Pakistanis as it referred the controversial Elections (Amendment) Bill, 2021 and the Elections (Second Amendment) Bill, 2021 to a joint sitting of the Parliament amid strong protest by all the opposition parties.

The legislation will amend the Election Act, 2017. The motion to refer the bills to the joint sitting was adopted by the House in absence of the opposition members who had walked out after pointing out lack of quorum.

Since the start of the session on 17 September, the government struggled to complete a quorum in the House which prevented passage of the required motion. The two bills related to amendments in the Elections Act, 2017 were adopted by the National Assembly on 10 June this year but could pass the Senate within the stipulated 90 days.

As per the Constitution, the President may from time to time summon either or both houses of the parliament in a joint sitting. Adviser to the Prime Minister on Parliamentary Affairs Dr Babar Awan has said that the government will ensure that the bill seeking electronic-and-internet voting for the next polls is made law before the end of this year. With the government and the opposition sticking to their respective positions, it seems that both the sides are lurching towards an angry showdown in the parliament.

Political observers believe that PM Imran Khan enjoys popularity among the overseas Pakistanis and this is what has been causing panic among the opposition parties. They term I-voting for overseas Pakistanis a hope for PTI and despair for the opposition as the PML-N especially believes that overseas are inclined towards the PTI.

The introduction of I-voting for overseas Pakistanis is giving great confidence to the ruling PTI because it could boost its prospects for a possible second term in government.



However, the opposition parties, particularly the PML-N and the PPP, have their reservations to the government's electoral reforms agenda. They suspect that the government is pushing for electronic and I-voting to rig the elections.

The Pakistan Peoples' Party has also expressed its reservations about the new electoral scheme that the Imran Khan government is pushing for. But the PML-N is most worried because the party believes that it stands a chance to win the next polls if held fairly and freely.

On its part, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) has raised as many as 37 objections to the proposed introduction of EVMs. The ECP warned that the machine was tampering-prone and its software could easily be altered. "It is nearly impossible to ensure that every machine is honest," noted the ECP document submitted to a parliamentary body.

The ECP further said time was too short for a large-scale procurement and deployment of EVMs and imparting training to a massive number of operators, adding that it was not advisable to introduce EVMs nationwide in one go. It said the polls on one day as required under the law would be nearly impossible.

It also referred to various other issues linked with the use of EVMs, including lack of ballot secrecy, lack of capacity at all levels and lack of ensuring security and chain of custody for the machines at rest and during transportation.

It also pointed out that there would be no evidence available in case of an election dispute. It went on to say that in case of introduction of the technology in haste, the conduct of free, fair, credible and transparent elections as per the Constitution was not possible.

The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) is of the view that such technology could compromise a voter's secrecy as his choice might be tracked. It said the amendment lacked on critical questions pertaining to voting by overseas Pakistanis, including responsibility of their registration as voters and allocation to the constituency and mechanism for the ECP to enforce the legal requirements as provided for under Section 30 of the Elections Act, dealing with claims and objections, and Section 37 that deals with verification.

Minister for Law and Justice Farogh Naseem, however, rejected all objections of the opposition members, saying the Constitution and the Elections Act authorise the government to make changes in the election laws and use of advanced technology for fair and free elections.

He said the Election Commission of Pakistan also has no jurisdiction to oppose any changes in election laws, and asserted it was the Parliament to provide for conduct of elections under Article 222 (d) of the Constitution.

The use of Electronic Voting Machines and giving right of vote to overseas Pakistanis are not the only issues where

government and the opposition are disagreeing. The disagreement extends to the appointment of Chairman NAB and ECP members as well.

For the bill to be passed, it would need the vote of the majority of the total membership of the two Houses. The bill will then be signed by the speaker and sent to the president to be turned into law.

Technically, there is no constitutional issue with making laws through a joint session while no law requires that bills should have a consensus before being passed. Passing any election-related law though the majority is technically possible but it will remain controversial.

The proposed electoral reforms have been a hot issue in Pakistan nowadays where political parties have long accused each other of poll rigging. Amid a deepening controversy over the use of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and right of vote to overseas Pakistanis, the government and the opposition have agreed to form a parliamentary committee to discuss matters relating to electoral reforms but nothing fruitful is expected.

The passing of the controversial bills may trigger another round of animosity between government and the opposition parties. The parliament has seen violence even on petty issues before. What happens when both the government and the opposition take the proposed legislation as a matter of success and failure for them remains to be seen.





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People Suffer as Taliban Struggle to Bring Normalcy to Afghanistan

Living in peace is all an Afghan wants. Why is that too much?



By Haq Nawaz Khan

The people of Afghanistan are sick of conflict and eager to live in peace, but their hopes for tranquillity are withering in the face of the grotesque reality thrust upon them by a conspiracy of circumstances. Over two months after they took Kabul, the Taliban seem no closer to getting on top of the country's problems.

The militant group that remained invincible on the battlefield remains mired in negotiations on the foreign front and dithering in domestic affairs. Meanwhile, Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) fighters have gone kinetic, claiming attacks after suicide attack. With winter just around the corner and the economy shattered, hunger is proliferating and beggary and crime are on the upswing.

The war between the world and the Taliban ended after the complete withdrawal of the US led foreign troops from Afghanistan. There is no more political or military resistance to the Taliban in the country. They control the country from East to the West and South to the North.

The resistance group or National Resistance Front of Panjshir valley is no more in the region. The Valley that defied the Soviet juggernaut and then Taliban's original rise to power is now ruled by the Taliban.

But the security threat from Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) is growing alarmingly all around the country. The group has claimed several deadly attacks since the Taliban took over Kabul.

Among the attacks for which ISKP claimed responsibility are Kabul airport bombings, a bomb attack on a memorial ceremony of the mother of the acting deputy information minister Zabihullah Mujahid, and also the October 8 suicide attack on the Shi'ite Hazara Muslims community in a Friday's prayer in a mosque in Saeedabad, Kunduz.

There are reports of clashes between the Taliban forces and ISKP militants in the eastern Kunar province, Nangarhar (said to be a base for the group), Khost, Zabul, and Kabul. However, the Taliban do not see it as a serious threat and claim they can eliminate the group.

On the day ISKP claimed the Kunduz suicide attack targeting the Shi'ite Hazara community, the Taliban governor for Khost Mawlawi Nabi Omari claimed the arrest of 7-8 members of the ISKP in the province, and killing of many others in a clash.

The US had offered to jointly counter the ISKP in Afghanistan, but the Taliban turned down the offer, claiming

that its fighters could take on the ISKP alone. Some of the Taliban fighters were reportedly killed in sting operations by the ISKP, and some were kidnapped and tortured to death.

The major challenge on the hands of the Taliban is securing international recognition for their government, without which the country can neither engage in international trade nor receive any aid. The world is watching Kabul closely, and no state has recognized the new government of the Taliban because the international community is not satisfied with the current Taliban-only political dispensation.

Equally worrisome for the world are the Taliban moves to put restrictions on women, keep them out of the cabinet and government, and close the doors of educational institutions to girls beyond the sixth grade. Small wonder no breakthrough has been achieved in the weeks of negotiations between the Taliban and the representatives of the international community.

A delegation led by the Taliban Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and including the Acting Information Minister Mullah Khairullah Khairkhwah and senior leader Mawlawi Shahab Ud Din Dilawar left for Doha, Qatar on 8 October.

Meanwhile, Russia has confirmed that the Taliban will take part in a round of negotiations scheduled for 20 October in Moscow to discuss the prevailing situation in Afghanistan. The conference is likely to be attended by the representatives of China, Pakistan, Iran and India. However, the Taliban has not formally responded to the call, whether to attend it or not.

The government infrastructure is only partly functional. The Taliban chief of the Passport Authority Mawlawi Alam Gul Haqqani announced in a news conference that the government would release salaries of the last 3 months to all the government employees soon. "I am going to share this good news with the employees that the cabinet has given approval to pay the salaries of the last 3 months."

Overland Afghan trade remains stymied by closure of border crossings with neighbouring countries. The Chaman-Spin Boldak crossing has been shut for trade and pedestrians recently.

The Taliban are working to control the street crimes like robbery, theft, snatching, and kidnapping for ransom, but so far they have not succeeded. The Taliban police have been arresting the criminals, but there are no trials as the court system is yet to be made functional in the country.

Earlier, the Taliban came under severe criticism over the public executions of the alleged criminals without due process. In the western capital city Herat, the bodies of four alleged kidnappers were recently hanged in the square from a crane after they were shot dead in an alleged encounter.

The Taliban defended the act as sending the message to all the criminals, kidnappers and outlaws to avoid crimes, or be ready to face the same punishments.

In background interviews, many of the Taliban officials in the police and other law enforcement agencies are supportive of the public executions of the criminals, but some say the courts should decide the fate of the alleged criminals.

"Our job is to ensure law and order in the country," one police officer stated. "We arrest the alleged criminals, investigate them, and hand them over to the police headquarters for further investigations. Then we should produce the accused criminals before the court of law, and it is for the court to release them or punish them".

It is still unclear if the Taliban would bring back the system they enforced in their first stint in power or move forward with some reforms.



Is Afghanistan the Newest Theatre of Sunni-Salafi War?

The Sunni-Salafi fault line that earlier scorched Iraq and Levant seems set to ignite in Taliban's Afghanistan.

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

The initial assessments by many including the Taliban that downplayed the threat of Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) may be about to fall by the wayside as recent developments suggest the Afghan affiliate of the Iraqi militant group is preparing to deploy the sectarian playbook it used in Iraq and Syria to devastating effect.

It all began on 28 August 2011 when Abu Obaidullah Mutawakil, a Salafi cleric in Kabul, mysteriously disappeared after a suicide bombing by Islamic State in Khorasan Province (ISKP) at Kabul Airport. A week later, his tortured body was found.

The Taliban were directly blamed for the killings, but they denied it. To this day, ISKP's social media team blames the Taliban for the killings. People who are aware of the emerging conflict in Afghanistan interpret the assassination of a Salafi scholar as a declaration of war against ISKP by the Taliban.

This is what happened after ISKP launched a series of attacks in Nangarhar and Kabul,

killing several Taliban fighters. In retaliation, locals saw an increase of dead bodies dumped into different areas. The ISKP claimed that the Taliban had captured ISKP fighters and are now dumping their bodies. This has become a routine as every attack carried by ISKP is followed by the killing of a Salafi scholar or ISKP fighter.

Among those killed were Salafi Qari Rohullah from Nangarhar and Zahidullah, brother of Salafi scholar Maulvi Israr. Meanwhile, more than three dozens Salafi mosques in 16 Afghan provinces, including Kabul, Nangarhar, and Kunar, have been ordered closed.

Against these measures, there is currently some tension within Afghanistan between the Salafi and Deobandi schools of thought in the Sunni religious circles.

The Taliban have now launched a major operation against ISKP in Nangarhar and Kunar, and so far dozens of ISKP fighters have been killed. Some of those killed were from Central Asian states.

ISKP strongholds in Nangarhar, and especially in Kunar, are historically signifi-

cant. Inspired by Salafi ideology in 1990, Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman declared jihad against the Mujahideen who had defeated Russia – although he had joined the jihad against Russia alongside the Gulbadin Hikmatyar led Hizb-e-Islami.

Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman then established a separate state within Afghanistan in the style of the existing Islamic State, calling it the “Islamic Emirate in Kunar”. Asadabad was declared the capital of this state. Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman formed a cabinet in the style of a regular central government that included health, education, finance, foreign, and defense ministers.

However, due to the Salafi ideology, he issued a fatwa of disbelief on the Mujahideen, prompting Hekmatyar to launch an armed operation against him. As a result of this war, Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman was forced to take refuge in Bajaur, a Pakistani territory adjacent to Kunar province of Afghanistan.

After settling down here, he also impressed Sufi Muhammad, the head of Tehreek-e-Nifaz-e-Shariat-e-Mohammadi



(TNSM), with his Salafi thoughts. But his stay was brief. In August 1991, his opponents shot and killed Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman in Bajaur.

Even now, there are thousands of followers of Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman, as followers of the Salafi school of thought in Kunar, Nangarhar, Badakhshan, and the entire Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Abu Ubaidullah Mutawakil, who was killed in Kabul, was also one of the followers of Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman.

When the Taliban launched an offensive against ISKP in 2019 in various areas, including Nangarhar, Kunar, and Badakhshan, many fighters belonging to the Salafi school of thought were killed. Therefore, when the Taliban claimed in 2020 that they had eliminated ISKP in Afghanistan, the scholars of the Afghan Salafi Council led by Sheikh Abdul Aziz Nuristani met with the Taliban.

Hayatullah, the nephew of Sheikh Jameel-ur-Rehman, the founder of Salafi ideology in Afghanistan, was also present at that meeting. The clerics pledged allegiance to Afghan Taliban leader Sheikh Hebatullah Akhundzada.

According to the sources present in that meeting, it was necessary for the Salafi scholars because they feared that the Taliban would target them considering them ISKP recruiters.

Although the Taliban reassured them, what happened to them after the Taliban's arrival confirmed their fears. Many Salafi scholars have gone underground since the assassination of Abu Ubaidullah Mutawakil. They include scholars such as Abdul Zahir Daai and Ustad Maroof Rasikh from Kabul and Sheikh Ahmad Shah and Sheikh Sardar Wali from Nangarhar province.

Many Salafi scholars in Afghanistan were hated by ISKP for their reasonable and balanced views and their refusal to align with ISKP in Afghanistan. Therefore, those who are close to the Afghan theater of war believe that this war is now about to take the form of an ideological war within the fighting forces that fought against foreign forces in the past.

In response to the Taliban's full-scale operation, ISKP has started recruitment.

Their strategy is inciting revenge by condemning the operation as Taliban atrocities against the pious on the one hand and boosting morale by carrying out targeted attacks on the other.

Sources close to ISKP believe that, like the Ahl al-Hadith Salafi clerics, the central leadership of ISKP was expecting these actions from the Taliban. ISKP insiders believe that this was the reason why the central leadership sent Dr Shahab Al Mohajir as governor when the Afghan National Army and the Taliban launched operations against them in Nangarhar and Kunar.

As soon as he arrived, Al Mohajir ordered adoption of guerrilla warfare tactics to bedevil the concentrated attacking forces through kinetic operations by small sleeper cells spread over a wide area.

Following these orders, ISKP launched their operations in Kabul through sleeper cells based around the city. Likewise they carried out an attack on a Shiite mosque in Kunduz, in the extreme north of Afghanistan bordering Tajikistan. The attacker was claimed as Mohammad Yughuri, a Chinese muslim.

The ISKP central leadership is fully aware of the Taliban's strengths and weaknesses, sources said. The ISKP is currently carrying out propaganda, recruitment, and guerrilla warfare. That is why their first use of propaganda is highlighting the promises and manifesto of the Taliban movement and how the Taliban leadership is deviating from its cause.

In this way, the killing of the dying clerics is being exaggerated alleging that the Taliban are killing true Muslims to please the West. They are inflaming sectarian feelings by emphasising how the Taliban are safeguarding Iranian interests in Afghanistan.

As far as kinetic operations are concerned, ISKP intends to gradually move out of Nangarhar and Kunar and intensify operations in other parts of Afghanistan, such as Kabul and in Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province itself.

ISKP believes that this will serve to divert the Taliban's attention from Nangarhar and Kunar as well as assert the presence of ISKP in other areas of the country. It seems the real focus of ISKP right is now

on recruitment. They have no shortage of weapons and resources other than human numbers.

As far as their training is concerned, it is the exact opposite of the Taliban training. Apart from innovation, it has been seen that their focus has been on urban warfare.

The Taliban, on the other hand, are trying to crush them by force. We can see that the results are what ISKP wanted. In the same way that ISIS has taken a sectarian path by targeting the Shiites population in Iraq and creating sectarian division, the Taliban actions are alienating the Ahl al-Hadith or Salafi Muslims.

The reaction of the locals and the Ahl al-Hadith to Abu Ubaidullah's funeral was alarming. The speech delivered by Sheikh Khushal Khan Haleem was threatening in tone and tenor, although he did not name the Taliban.

On their part, the Taliban are denying their existence of ISKP and claiming it was formed with the support of the former Afghan government, all in the same breath. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid has repeatedly said that ISKP does not exist in Afghanistan. But then the funeral of his mother was targeted with a suicide bombing claims by ISKP.

The Taliban currently face internal problems, both in terms of governance and security. They will be able to overcome both problems by brute force over the short run, but their long term prospects are not nearly as promising.

The Taliban do not seem to understand the problem of ISKP. They have an advantage at the moment and that is years-long war experience. A fundamental problem is that the Taliban know how to take on an entrenched power from out in the cold.

This time, however, the show is on the other foot. The Taliban are the entrenched power and the ISKP the warriors from out in the cold. They will have to realise the difference and master their new situation before they can take on the ISKP threat with any success.

Before that, however, they have to figure the ideological underpinnings of the existence of ISKP.

Taliban Retain Kabul's 10,000 Municipal Employees

Municipal services are up and running, says Hamdullah Nomani, the acting mayor of Kabul, in an exclusive interview with TTI.

By Zarghoon Shah

Afghanistan's Taliban regime has retained the 10,000 or so municipal employees it inherited from Dr Ashraf Ghani's regime, says Hamdullah Nomani (HN), the acting mayor of the capital appointed by the new government.

Nomani was the Mayor of Kabul under the groups' first stint in power (1996–2001). A stalwart of the puritanical militia and not one to shy away from controversy, Nomani in September ordered the city's women civil servants to stay home, and announced the resurgent Taliban would not allow women to take up jobs that men could do.

Born in Sipayaw village of the Andar District of Ghazni Province, Nomani also served as Minister of Higher Education and member of the Taliban Supreme Council. He is among the Taliban leaders whose names were put on a UN sanctions list.

The Truth International (TTI) got an exclusive opportunity to interview Nomani.

TTI: What is the biggest challenge right now for you and your office?

HN: We do not face any specific or major challenge. Things are looking up and starting to work. But not all the departments of our government have started functioning as of yet. This is why we have had to trim some jobs.

You know some tasks require collective functioning of two or three departments, so we are waiting for the functioning of some other departments. When they start working, our problems will be resolved.

TTI: Kabul seems to be facing a huge traffic problem. We have witnessed traffic lights missing and traffic police stretched thin. How would you tackle this issue?

HN: As I said, some jobs are to be done in collaboration with other departments, Kabul municipality works in coordination with the ministry of interior, which is yet to begin its functioning. So vis-à-vis city's traffic, we will have to see what is our responsibility and what is theirs.



TTI: What particular measures your office plans to take with regard to the capital's sewerage, cleanliness, lighting, etc.?

HN: We restored the civic sanitation service from day one. You know the very first department that started working after Kabul's takeover by the Taliban was the Kabul Sharwali [municipal services]. I was named mayor of Kabul municipality three days after [the Taliban took Kabul]. We immediately focused on around six highly important areas, and one of them was the sewerage and cleanliness of the city. So work on both these areas is continuing without any difficulty.

TTI: May I know if the Kabul municipality is being run by the pre-Taliban staff or if you have inducted fresh employees?

HN: No, we have not hired new staff. Kabul Sharwali is manned by the same old staff, and there were few cases of desertion, [but] we have plugged the gaps.

TTI: What's the total number of Kabul municipality employees?

HN: We have 3,000 employees in our offices who are busy in clerical jobs, paperwork etc., and we have 7,000 ajeers – employees who take care of the city's greenery, who water plants and flowers and cater to sweeping, etc.

TTI: The city of Kabul was plagued with roadblocks. To what extent have you removed them?

HN: We have been working on the removal of these unnecessary roadblocks for about a month now, and we are removing all those that are a hindrance to common people on common roads. But those in front of embassies, certain departments, and important premises will stay.

TTI: Beggary is phenomenally on the rise in Kabul. We have seen little children and women begging in almost every nook and corner of the capital. Would your office also address this issue?

HN: You are very right. You see on this side we are not only confronted with beggary, specifically child beggars. There are other problems too like kidnapping for ransom. Once all departments of our government become fully operational, I am sure we would be able to address this issue.

TTI: So what other social and civic issues is your office facing right now?

HN: As I said, we would be addressing at priority the issue of displaced persons from other provinces, beggars, encroachment, drug addicts, etc., but at the moment we are dealing with traffic jams.

Daesh Finance Minister Sami Al-Jaburi Arrested in Iraq

Jaburi within Daesh had reportedly served as the equivalent to finance minister, supervising the group's revenue-generating operations from illicit sales of oil, gas, antiquities and minerals.



TTI Report

BAGHDAD: Iraqi security officials have arrested finance minister of Daesh group Sami Jasim Al-Jaburi. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi announced today (Oct 11). Al-Jaburi was wanted by the United States.

The US Rewards for Justice program said Jaburi within Daesh had reportedly served as the equivalent to finance minister, supervising the group's revenue-generating operations from illicit sales of oil, gas, antiquities and minerals."

Jaburi, also believed to be the former deputy to the late Daesh leader Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi, was arrested by intelligence services outside the borders of Iraq, Kadhimi PM said on Twitter.

He did not specify the location but said Jaburi was captured in a complex external operation. The US had offered a reward of up to \$5 million for arresting Jaburi.

In September 2015, the US Treasury Department labelled Jaburi as a Specially Designated Global Terrorist. Daesh took a third of Iraq in a lightning offensive in 2014.

Iraq's government declared victory against the militants in late 2017 after a grinding military campaign backed by a US-led coalition.

Baghdadi was killed in a raid by US special forces in northwestern Syria in October 2019.

Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), Arabic al-Dawlah al-Islāmiyyah fī al-ʿIrāq wa al-Shām, Arabic abbreviation Dāish or Daesh, also called Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS) and, since June 2014, the Islamic State, transnational Sunni insurgent group operating primarily in western Iraq and eastern Syria.

First appearing under the name ISIL in April 2013, the group launched an offensive in early 2014 that drove Iraqi government forces out of key western cities, while in Syria it fought both government forces and rebel factions in the Syrian Civil War. In June 2014, after making significant territorial gains in Iraq, the group proclaimed the establishment of a caliphate led by the leader of ISIL, Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi.

International efforts to defeat the group led to its decline, and both Syria and Iraq considered ISIL effectively defeated by November 2017, though ISIL continued to hold a small amount of territory until March 2019. Certain affiliates with only weak ties to ISIL leadership, most notably Islamic State–Khorasan Province (ISKP; also called ISIS-K), remained active elsewhere.

Outmached and Outplayed, Then and Now

Why India is no match for China in the two neighbours' tussle for ascendancy.



By Malik Zahoor

Napoleon was right then and is right now 200 years later. To understand the current crisis, it is critical to view it in the context of history.

India did not learn its lesson in 1962 and was condemned to repeat the same mistake in 2020. Aksai Chin was the battleground then and now. Draped in snow with temperatures below freezing, the area is part of greater Kashmir. Ladakh is part of it and is claimed both by China and India because of its strategic location.

The Line of Actual Control (LAC) is a loosely defined border that emerged out of the 1962 war in which India inflicted significant casualties on itself and suffered domestic and international humiliation. Prior to the escalation of tensions, Indian provocations were alarming. China accused India of undermining its rule in Tibet. India, encouraged by the West as some independent analysts believed, charged China with suppressing Tibetan autonomy. While China emerged victorious, it strongly believes even to this day that India played in the hands of the U.S. which views supporting India as a way to counter-balance China's growing power.

Distrust was further heightened by India's grant of asylum to the Dalai Lama in 1959

after the uprising in Tibet. India also kept a policy of patrolling the disputed Ladakh area despite multiple Chinese warnings and protests. China tried to resolve the outstanding issues through peaceful negotiations, but India rejected its efforts. Instead, India continued fishing expeditions in Aksai Chin which is a critical link between Tibet and Xinjiang. China finally invaded the disputed territory across the McMahon Line, named after the British administrator who proposed it in 1914, and captured the massive area. In step with traditional Chinese wisdom, it soon pulled back into its claimed territory behind the Line of Actual Control and declared a unilateral ceasefire.

China is a sleeping giant. Let her sleep, for when she wakes she will move the world. – Napoleon Bonaparte

Prime Minister Nehru called out to the Western countries for help. He was heartbroken and took this gigantic defeat to his ashes in 1964. The U.S. and most of the western countries including the Soviet Union sided with India and deemed China the aggressor. However, other voices though muted were raised as well. For example, James Colvin from the U.S. Marine Corps blamed India for its provocation towards China. Colvin believed that

the Chinese showed a “pattern of conservative aims and limited objectives, rather than expansionism.”

Surprisingly, then U.S. Defense Secretary Robert McNamara advised President Kennedy to go for the nuclear option. That demonstrated that India did not act on its own. President Kennedy turned down the nuclear suggestion and advocated for keeping India in conventional weapons armament which in the eyes of Nehru was way short of its expectations. As a result, the U.S.-India honeymoon died much earlier than expected and drew India closer to the Soviet Union. Later, in 1964, China shocked the world by developing its own nuclear device.

While the world by and large bought the Indian version of the war and blasted China with the expansionist and aggressor labels, contrarian minority views were voiced by some independent writers and scholars.

Neville Maxwell, a British scholar and journalist who served as South Asia correspondent of the Times in New Delhi, was up close to the conflict shared a perspective from a different lens. In his authoritative book, “India's China War,” he noted how India led the world up the garden path and demolished the myth that

India was the victim of unprovoked Chinese aggression. Maxwell writes that India was the “expansionist aggressor, used the armed forces imprudently, overruling the advice of military field commanders, while China was the aggrieved party.”

As a result of Maxwell’s extensive research corroborated by the Indian Defense Department and British sources, his book emerged as a bombshell. India always hated Maxwell and its writers supported the assertion that he was bankrolled by the Chinese to write the book. But more independent voices kept surfacing claiming that Prime Minister Nehru was wrongly led to believe that Indian national security interest would be best served by a blitzkrieg on Indian terms.

T.J.S. George, an Indian author and biographer observed that “we should never make the mistake of assuming that Maxwell wrote the damn book at the behest of China.”

President Ayub Khan did a great service to Pakistan’s national security when he settled Pakistan-China border issues and ceded territory to China in 1963. Khan went a step further according to a highly regarded British journalist, Irfan Husain, and turned down the suggestion by the Chinese Ambassador to take advantage and capture Kashmir when the Indian chips were down.

Alastair Lamb, a British historian, writes in the preface to his book “The Sino-Indian border in Ladakh,” without the settlement of the Sino-Pakistani border . . . Pakistan might never have evolved today not only China’s major ally on the littoral of the Indian Ocean but also a state in direct land contact with Chinese territory by a motor road through the Karakoram.”

In order to fully grasp the genesis of the current developments in Aksai Chin, revisiting what happened in 1962 offers much better perspective. After decades of episodic border skirmishes, threats of surgical strikes in Pakistan, and general ebbs and flows in hostilities, Modi’s India directed its war machines where Waterloo was written on the wall. Possibly, Prime Minister Nehru was misguided and got ensnared into the unintentional fallout of a wrong decision. But Prime Minister Modi’s misadventure is just an action replay. For Sino-India watchers, it is still an enigma why anyone would fight for an area which according to Maxwell is “no man’s land where nothing grows and no one lives.”

Aidan Milliff, an expert on South Asian studies at MIT, is perplexed when he says “it is not clear to me whether these disputes start as carefully calculated provocations or as missteps and misunderstandings.” Mr. Miliff, however, concedes that China’s recent advances are a response to India’s structure building in the areas strategically sensitive and a possible future flashpoint.

The constitutional amendments last year changing the special status of Jammu and Kashmir including Ladakh was seen by China as a direct threat. According to Harsh V. Pant, a professor of international relations at King’s College London, “these changes caused worries in China because the area connects China to Pakistan.”

A month long Doklam standoff in 2017, construction of a huge network of roads parallel to the Line of Actual Control, building of Daulat Beg Oldi airport – the world’s highest airfield-all combined were irritants enough to justify a Chinese response.

New Delhi’s justification for infrastructure building was seen in Beijing as a direct threat to its geo-strategic goals particularly the Belt & Road (B & R) plans aimed at global outreach in trade and development.

The Indian moves are also viewed by both Islamabad and Beijing as a direct threat to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)-which stands frozen, where China has invested more than \$60 billion. CPEC is the flagship program of B&R and a linchpin for all the future developments in the area and beyond.

All said and done, Beijing is unstoppable. It will continue to forge ahead with the belt and road initiative (B&R), the epicenter of its global development strategy adopted in 2013 which involves several countries. The present gridlock will melt away but would leave behind scars. China would not allow further escalation for multiple tactical as well as strategic reasons.

It would not at any cost let the U.S.-India alliance-which is part of America’s Indo-Pacific broader strategy-grow and fester. Secondly, India is not the primary focus of its foreign policy. Given its size and economic prowess, India’s aspirations to be recognized as a regional policeman may have certain justification. China, on the other hand, keeps its sights higher than the Himalayas with a much deeper strategy for global outreach on its chessboard.

The writer is a former information minister at the Embassy of Pakistan in Washington DC. He has also served as chair of the US- Pakistan-Afghanistan Trilateral initiative on agriculture. He is currently writing a book: Military, Militancy & Democracy in Pakistan.



The Birth Pangs of Digital Economy

The underwhelming market response to PTA's NGMS spectrum auction amply demonstrates how tricky it is to spawn a tech revolution our own.



By Azeem Waqas

That Pakistan's Next Generation Mobile Services (NGMS) auction did not bring in the revenue it could be beside the point. The real issue is that the telecom sector regulator was out of its depth before, during, and after the episode.

It has now been established beyond reasonable doubt that the Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) did not know how much revenue to expect from the auction; it did not know how to promote the auction; and it did not know how to move on from the mess gracefully.

In hindsight, it looks very much like the USD 1 billion revenue target plucked from thin air for the heck of it. A billion dollar auction certainly has a ring to it. In the event, the auction attracted exactly one market player and raised USD 279 million – just over a quarter of the overambitious target.

Small wonder Prime Minister Imran Khan regretted on the results of NGMS auction and showed displeasure over PTA's inability to get the telcos interest.

"Telecom Companies had shown a very lukewarm response in the auction of spectrum due to the government policies", Former Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of the Universal Service Fund (USF), Pervaiz Iftikhar said.

The only telco to buy into the proposition was PTML (Pakistan Telecom Mobile Limited), the owner of the Ufone brand of mobile telephony.

"Out of four potential bidders only one participated in the auction and government could not sell the 70 percent of the spectrum", he said, adding, "It has been able to sell only 30 percent – meaning the industry response was not encouraging".

PTA, on the other hand, is more focused on what it has achieved: [The successful spectrum auction to PTML] will generate USD 279 Million in revenue – excluding advance tax.

The government will receive 50 percent upfront payment (that calculates to PKR 23.44 billion) within 15 days, 20 percent of which (i.e., PKR 9.38 billion) had already been received as of 9 September

2021. The remaining 50 percent will be paid in 5 equal annual instalments.

Pervaiz Iftikhar says PTA's stringent quality benchmarks could be one reason why the telcos remain away from the auction.

As per the Information Memorandum of NGMS, for 3G services the licensee will upgrade to an average download data rate of 512 kbps, to be further increased to 1 Mbps in two years. Upload throughput is required to be at least 25 percent of the download throughput.

This translates to an average download data rate of 2 Mbps for 4G services, to be increased to 4 Mbps in two years, with equal yearly increase. A grace period of 6 months in achieving the throughput KPI of 4Mbps will be granted from the second year of the effective date for testing.

Pervaiz Iftikhar says that PTA could have generated more than USD 1 billion either by reducing the base price or by relaxing the Quality of Services requirement.

PTA says that total spectrum won by Ufone is 9 MHz in 1800 MHz band which is 70.3 percent of the total offered spectrum in the said band during the current Auction. This addition will increase Ufone spectrum holdings from 6 MHz to 15 MHz in 1800 MHz band.

This should help Ufone enhance its quality of service and increase its network footprint for both voice and data services. The total revenue generated from this spectrum auction process for AJK & GB stands at over USD 30 million.

Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) presented two bands for auction. For 1800MHz base price was set USD 31 million and for 2100 MHz it was USD 29 million.

The 1800MHz band, which provides a preferred spectrum holding for 4G/LTE services and a better mix for urban and rural deployment, has been allocated and used in a manner which does not offer contiguous spectrum blocks to each mobile operator. Nevertheless, Ufone has now acquired 70 percent of the 1800MHz while 0 percent of the 2100MHz.

PTML, the only Pakistani mobile operator to participate in the auction out of four, is a wholly owned subsidiary of Pakistan Telecommunication Company Limited (PTCL). Although the former terrestrial telephony monopoly is still majority owned by the public sector, the UAE based Etisalat has had management control of the company since 2006 under a privatisation deal.

Etisalat and the government still have some unresolved issues from the PTCL privatisation. Seen in this light, the deal marks a warming up of the relations between the two.

Islamabad based think tank Tabadlab has cited major reasons about the underwhelming response of NGMS auction. A report by Tabadlab states that the sustained and continuing depreciation of the Pakistani Rupee (approximately 28 percent from 2018 to 2021 alone) affects the business case of investing in Pakistan drastically.

Investments made in foreign currency and revenue and profits generated in local currency continue to suffer from a growing

delta as the PKR depreciates. Returns on investments (old and new) continue to be diluted and investors face significant risks in terms of realising returns in a timely and stable manner.

The second reason is inflationary pressures especially for food groups translate into lower spending on discretionary services like internet usage and other value-added services, squeezing the market and the potential for revenue growth for mobile operators.

Taxation is also one of the reasons. Historically, Pakistan has had one of the highest taxation rates on telecom services. The structure of import, income and sales taxes on the sector significantly impacts retail pricing for mobile devices, SIM cards and telecom services, affecting usage and Average Revenue Per Unit (ARPU).



Sales tax in the mobile sector varies across goods and services and across regions in Pakistan, with rates as high as 19.5 percent in the provinces. In June 2021, the government announced the withdrawal of twelve withholding taxes for telecom, while taxes on mobile phone calls lasting longer than five minutes were also announced at a rate of PKR 0.75 per call.

With one of the lowest ARPUs in the region at PKR 240, the case for high investment in spectrum, in the face of relatively low corresponding returns, remains weak, the report states.

According to Tabadlab, the regulatory landscape is tough for investors. The two largest operators – Jazz and Telenor – initiated legal proceedings after their license renewal in 2019 over concerns that the renewal conditions are contradictory to the original license issuance conditions with regards to the high renewal fee.

While the renewal process had been challenged, the operators were mandated to payment of 50 percent of the renewal fees and after a process of two years, the case was dismissed by Islamabad High Court against the operators and the decision has now been challenged in the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

This kind of litigious context for the government and telco operators is potentially toxic for the wider investment confidence and the increasingly bright prospects in the technology ecosystem.

According to Tabadlab: “Results of the NGMS auction should be a source of disappointment and serious concern for Pakistani policy makers”.

The auction results have also increased the economic woes of the government. Leaving an unsanctioned spectrum not only limits the upfront foreign exchange that could have been earned, but also impacts both the associated investments in capacity, and the recurring tax revenue that could be generated through consistent growth of the telecom sector directly, and associated sectors indirectly.

Limited participation by existing investors also has an important bearing on signalling to new and potential investors actively exploring the digital landscape in Pakistan.

This is especially problematic as the government attempts to market the bold reform mind-set that has led to the creation of the Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA) and its vital potential in stirring the latent energy of the tech ecosystem in Pakistan.

The PTA, however, remains unperturbed. “It is not the job of the PTA to raise non tax revenue”, says Chairman Major General (R) Amir Azeem Bajwa. “But it would try to achieve maximum revenue by selling the unused spectrum”.

A Law to Let the Big Fish Off the Hook

Turns out government functionaries are not the only beneficiaries of the NAB (Amendment) Ordinance 2021.



By Asadullah

As well as instituting immunity from prosecution for government functionaries, the NAB (Amendment) Ordinance, 2021 seems to bring major relief to the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leadership in existing accountability cases.

The Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government has promulgated a presidential ordinance to give immunity to the government functionaries, and members of bureaucracy and the business community. The opposition criticizing the temporary legislation, but a section of the opposition has since toned down its criticism.

The law has slightly extended the tenure of incumbent chairman National Accountability Bureau (NAB) for a period of 04 months, and enables a second term in office for the sitting chairman. The Ordinance amended subsection (b) of section 6 of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) to give extension to the chairman NAB by excluding the word non-extendable from the statute. It however intact the proviso that made the consultation of the opposition

leader and the leader of the house but it stated that the President will consult both of them.

It increased the role of the opposition as well as enhanced the parliamentary oversight as it provided a forum of 12 members Parliamentary Committee in case the consultation of the PM and the opposition leader would turn futile exercise.

Observers say the drastic changes in the law have defanged the anti-corruption watchdog, at least for the ruling party.

The most salient feature of the ordinance is that it excludes the federal and provincial cabinets, business community, collective decisions of the Committees or Sub-Committees, Council of Common Interests (CCI), National Economic Council (NEC), National Finance Commission (NFC), Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC), Central Development Working Party (CDWP), Provincial Development Working Party (PDWP), Departmental Development

Working Party (DDWP), and the State Bank of Pakistan from the ambit of NAB.

As per the ordinance, “all matters pertaining to Federal, Provincial or Local taxation, other levies or imposts, including refunds, or loss of exchequer pertaining to taxation” will be dealt in accordance with the revenue or banking laws and will be transferred from the accountability courts to the courts of competent jurisdiction.

Besides the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), the other biggest beneficiary of the law is the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) since the main leadership of the PPP including former President Asif Ali Zardari facing references that related to the financial or procedural irregularities and decisions of either cabinet, or its auxiliary committees.

Interestingly, even before the promulgation of the ordinance, Mr Zardari was seeking transfer of Park Lane reference to the Banking Court since it was related to the defaulting the bank loans.

Initially, the cases against Mr Zardari were being heard by the Banking Court of Karachi. However, pursuant to the investigation into the fake accounts case as was directed by the Supreme Court, the case was transferred to NAB, where it gave birth to about a dozen references.

Law experts believe some of these cases might be dropped in the light of the newly promulgated ordinance, while others would be transferred from the accountability courts to either Banking Courts or Federal Board of Revenue (FBR), since the government has recently empowered the latter with the power to make arrests.

Chief Minister Sindh Syed Murad Ali Shah, will be another beneficiary of the ordinance. Though, he criticized the law at the outset while he appeared before the accountability court of Islamabad a couple of days after the promulgation of the ordinance, he toned down his criticism later on by saying that he would read the official version of the ordinance first to give an appropriate response.

The main opposition Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) however strongly criticizing the law, since it brings no relief to its main leadership including Mian Nawaz Sharif, Shahbaz Sharif, and even Maryam Nawaz, the Mian family.

Unlike the references against the mainstream leadership of PPP which are of the financial and procedural irregularities, the PML-N leadership has been implicated in the references based on accumulation of assets.

The new law does not bring any concession for the accused facing assets references.

The law defined asset as “all kinds of property owned, controlled by or belonging to an accused, whether directly or indirectly, or held as benami in the name of his spouse, relatives, associate, or any other person, whether within or outside Pakistan, which he cannot reasonably and lawfully account for.”

However, the PML-N leaders like former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, former Interior Minister Ahsan Iqbal and a few others are likely to benefit from the ordinance since cases against them are not related to accumulation of assets, but pertain to not adhering to the relevant rules.

The ordinance enhanced the authority of the Prosecutor General (PG) NAB and empowering him of playing crucial role in advising chairman NAB to filing or withdrawing any reference from the court.

Interestingly, the government has extended the term of the incumbent PG Syed Asghar Haider for another three years, to which end President Dr Arif Alvi promulgated an unprecedented two-line ordinance.

Haider, a former judge of the Lahore High Court, was appointed NAB prosecutor general in January 2018 for a period of three years. The NAB law clearly bars an extension in the tenure of prosecutor general. Section 8(a)(iii) of the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO) says: “The Prosecutor General Accountability shall hold office for a [non-extendable] period of three years.”

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

Besides, it also allowed the accountability court the power to grant the bail to any accused. Under the existing NAB’s law, there is no provision of granting bail to the accused person as an under custody suspect could only apply for the bail after expiry of 90 days remand that too under the extraordinary jurisdiction of the high court under Article 199 of the Constitution that empower the high court to enforce fundamental rights.

The ordinance enabled the appointment of retired judges of the high court and sessions court as accountability judge. In addition, it provided that the sessions judge and the additional district and session judge may also be designated as the judge accountability court with the consent of the chief justices of the high courts concerned.

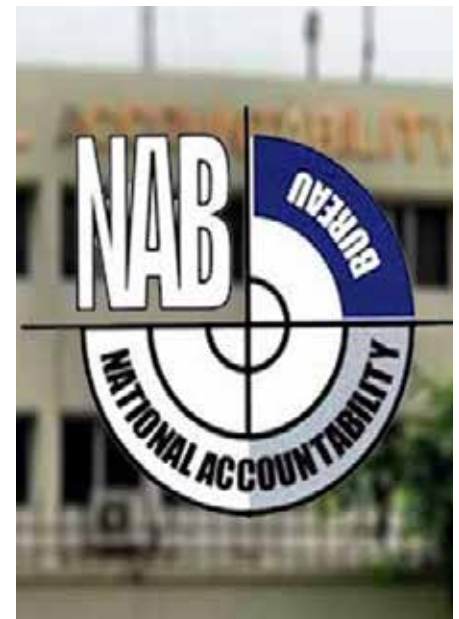
Though the PTI government has initially rejected to take the opposition leader on board for consultation on the new chairman NAB, federal ministers as well as the attorney general have since expressed possibility of taking the opposition on board.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry after the cabinet meeting of 5 October

announced the government would be introducing an ordinance for the appointment of the National Accountability Bureau’s chairperson in an attempt to fill the “lacuna” in the law that made it mandatory to consult the leader of the opposition on the matter.

He ruled out the possibility that PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif, the current leader of the opposition in the National Assembly, would be consulted on the appointment of the NAB chief.

“I still think that the opposition should change their leader so that we can hold talks on the matter,” the minister said, adding that the government was firm on its stance that Shahbaz would not be consulted since he had been accused in NAB cases.



The minister said the ordinance would elaborate on how the anti-graft watchdog’s head was to be appointed if the leader of the opposition was accused in corruption cases.

The government suggested that instead of the Leader of the House and the Opposition Leader, a committee comprising lawmakers from both sides could deliberate upon the appointment of new chairman NAB.

The episode is reminiscent of how PTI government was initially reluctant to give the chairmanship of the Public Accounts Committee (PAC) to Shahbaz Sharif on the same pretext but changed its stance later on. Shahbaz Sharif ultimately quit the chairmanship for Rana Tanveer Hussain, a senior member of the PML-N.



Crown Jewel of the Himalayas

One of Pakistan's most pristine Himalayan retreats, Karomber Lake leaves an indelible impression of all those who visit it.

The Hindukush Himalayas (HKH) is one of the world's richest biodiversity regions encompassing four global biodiversity hotspots, 60 ecoregions, and 488 endangered areas. More than 2,500 out of a total of 10,700 Himalayan plants are reported in HKH.

HKH region in North Pakistan has received inadequate attention due to its remoteness and inaccessibility. Pretty much every district of Pakistan is spotted with many regular attractions and authentic destinations that every avid traveller should visit at least once.

Situated in the north-western part of Pakistan, Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) is a land of many mighty mountains. Hidden among these wonderful geographical features you will discover the most pleasing valleys of the planet, and those valleys connect you to some of the world's most attractive natural lakes.

The Northern Areas of Pakistan are home to some of the world's high-altitude natural lakes and reservoirs. One of them is Karomber Lake, a high-altitude lake on the border of district Chitral of KP. Fed by glacial melt from the mountains surrounding it. The lake connects with Boroghil valley Chitral in the south and with Gilgit Baltistan in the east. It also borders on Afghanistan's Wakhan Corridor

Characterized by the lake's deep blue water as well as by the luxuriant vegetation, wild

growing flowers, cold breeze, and hot springs found in the immediate vicinity coupled with the breath-taking scenery of snow-capped mountains, the lake's unique ambiance and otherworldly beauty has mesmerised travellers and writers for years.

One of the most beautiful, pristine, and pure lakes of Pakistan is located at an elevation of 4,272 m. The surrounding area of Karomber Lake is home to some of the rare species of the world like snow leopard. Among other wildlife found in these climes are foxes, brown bears, wolf, and marmots.

The trek toward Karomber Lake is the most diverse trek in Northern Areas of Pakistan and has many entry and exit points to the lake. Rocky and bumpy trek with lush green pasture alongside River Kabul tugs the hearts of tourists and trekkers towards Karomber Lake.

The easy and shortest route to Karomber Lake is from the Chitral side via Mastuj, Broghil Valley. The total distance between Islamabad to Karomber Lake is 370 km. The route from Islamabad to Karomber Lake is via Islamabad-Peshawar Motorway and then at Colonel Sher Khan Interchange via Swat Motorway towards Chakdara. Onwards, the N45 route, Dir Chitral Road which connects Islamabad to Chitral.

Trek to Karamber Lake is a must on the bucket list of an adventure lover. Trekking on the way to the lake is easy but involves 6 to 9 hours of trekking so prior trekking

experience is preferable, and for those who find trekking difficult, horse riding is also available for PKR 7,000-10,000.

The whole journey from Islamabad to Karomber Lake is a seven day trip, which includes a two-day stay at the Lake itself. The Lake is also known as Qurumbar lake in some references and alternately is spelled as Karomber or Karamber. It is the 33rd highest lake in the world and one of the most biologically active.

Karomber Lake is the deepest lake in the valley with a maximum and mean depth of 55m and is spread over a surface area of 263.44 hectares and discharges into Karamber Valley of Boroghil and then into Immit Ishkoman of District Ghizer.

The water clarity level is 13.75, which is the highest value ever recorded in the literature of lakes in Pakistan. It is not very far away from Karamber Pass which connects Broghil Valley and Ghizer district. The outflow from the Lake feeds into another mini-lake before moving downstream towards Broghil. Another beautiful lake called Ribat Lake is about a mile from Karomber Lake.

The land of Karomber Lake expects the traveller to discover her jewels. Travelers sink into its blue waters. Departing is painful, even if one is going back home. Sometimes we look for home all around and when we find one, the time comes to part with it. But that's life, with another memory made, and a new chapter written.



Putting Pakistan Railways Back On the Rails

Work is finally underway to revive Karachi Circular Railway and upgrade the Karachi-Peshawar mainline.



By Muhammad Zahid Rifat

It seems the time is finally ripe for the renewal of Pakistan's long cold romance with railways as a mode of transportation. Two big-ticket projects that together have the potential to deliver just that have finally gotten underway.

Like many other mega development projects in different sectors, Karachi Circular Railway has also been in the boiling pot for more than two decades.

Hope for its revival to provide modern transportation services to the people of the provincial capital had glimmered in May 2019 when the Supreme Court of Pakistan – hearing cases concerning Karachi's mass transit woes – directed the Sindh government to revive Karachi Circular Railway within a month after physical encroachments on the track are removed.

However, it was only on 27 September 2021 when the provincial and federal (through its Ministry of Railways) governments took some practical steps. Credit for the projected revival of this important project as such really goes to the country's apex court though doubts already loom large over completion of the project within the timeline of two years period.

Foundation stone laying ceremony was performed by Prime Minister Imran Khan himself in the presence of Sindh Governor Imran Ismail and Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah and accordingly Karachi Circular Railway (KCR) is now hopefully to be revived in 18 to 24 months in two phases. Infrastructure facilities will be provided in the first phase, and operational activities will be initiated in the second phase. It would be a state of the art project having all modern facilities including fast moving electric trains.

On 25 September 2021, just two days ahead of the formal foundation stone laying ceremony, the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) approved the project for

elimination of 22 level crossings for the loop section of the KCR to facilitate free movement of trains.

The project, sponsored and to be executed by the Ministry of Railways, envisages construction of flyovers and underpasses along KCR route to eliminate 22 level crossings at the rationalized cost of over PKR 207 billion on cost sharing basis.

Only in July 2020, Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah had reiterated that the provincial government was committed to providing PKR 6 billion for development work to make the KCR fully operational.

The project has been included in the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as the Mass Transport System. The 6th Joint Cooperation Committee meeting in December 2018 had decided to fast-track the Pakistan-China joint venture project.

Railway Ministry's project Rehabilitation and Dualization of KCR Phase 11 was approved by the Central Development Working Party (CDWP) at a cost of PKR 8.7 billion and it has been included in the federal Public Sector Development Programme (PSDP) with an allocation of PKR 1.00 billion with no foreign aid for current financial year 2021-22.

Initially the project was to be financed by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and scheduled to be completed in 10 years but on the special directives of the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, the completion period was reduced to just 3 years and cost brought down considerably.

Originally designed to facilitate travelling of Pakistan Railways employees between their work places and residences, KCR was first commissioned in 1964. Later, in 1970, the service was extended in a circular shape connecting four major working places through 44 km tracks.

The circular railway remained the means of transportation of choice for the people of Karachi until 1984 when the number of its trains was reduced due to lack of maintenance and repairs facilities, a yawning gap between expenditure rising due to higher fuel and operational costs and revenue also decreasing because of subsidized tickets. The KCR was finally shut down in 1999 forcing thousands of its users to travel by buses.

Until the foundation ceremony of KCR performed recently, a couple of half-hearted initiatives were taken by federal and provincial governments from time to time but none of those came to fruition. In the meantime, encroachments flourished on the track, minimizing the chance of KCR's early revival, until the Supreme Court of Pakistan put its feet firmly down for the removal of encroachments and revival of KCR within two years.

People of Karachi now seem to be more confident and keeping their fingers crossed for KCR revival now that some concrete measures are being taken at the federal government level.

Railways being put back on rails

With foundation stone laying ceremony already performed at the highest level of the land, there are also renewed hopes and expectations about after all these long years, trains in the country are going to run at least on the Main Line (ML-1) from Peshawar to Karachi on freshly laid track in the coming years and that too at a much faster speed than now if all goes well.

Rehabilitation and up-gradation 1,872-km long Karachi-Lahore-Peshawar (ML-1) is to be undertaken under the umbrella of great game changer CPEC through Chinese Government concessional loan. A financial committee headed by the Deputy Chairman of the Planning Commission to liaise with Chinese authorities concerned to finalize the concessional financing agreement.

ML-1 runs from Karachi to Peshawar via Hyderabad, Nawabshah, Rohri, Rahim Yar Khan, Bahawalpur, Khanewal, Sahiwal, Lahore, Gujranwala, and Rawalpindi.

The mega project is to be completed in three phases in nine years at an estimated cost of USD 6808 million. It envisages accelerating speed of passenger trains from 65/110 km/h to 160 km/h and the freight trains will be operating at 120 km/h speed.

As per the scope of the mega Railways project, computer-based signaling and control system will be established, and grade separation will be undertaken to ensure safety of train operation. Work will be awarded through open biddings. Its feasibility has since been completed.

ML-1 project was declared a "strategic" project by the 6th Joint Cooperation Committee in Beijing. The framework agreement on ML-1 was signed on 15 May 2017 during the visit of the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to China.

Commercial contract for preliminary design was also signed on 15 May 2017, while the PC-1 was submitted to the Federal Ministry of Planning, Development and Special Initiatives in October 2019. The project was approved by the Central Development Working

Party (CDWP) on 6 June 2020 and by the Executive Committee of the National Economic Council (ECNEC) on 5 August 2020.

Upgradation of Pakistan Railways existing Main Line (ML-1) and establishment of a dry port near Havelian (2018-22) Phase 1 (CPEC), as okayed by the CDWP, has been listed in the federal PSDP as a new scheme along with other 8 new schemes for financial year 2021-22. The project will cost an estimated PKR 1,119.307 billion including foreign aid of PKR 1,066.323 billion with allocation of PKR 6.00 billion including foreign aid of PKR 2.99 billion for ongoing financial year 2021-22.

Mega Railway project was initiated during tenure of Railways Minister in PML(N) tenure Khwaja Sa'ad Rafiq, it was followed by PTI's Railways Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmad and is now being looked after by third Railways Minister, the PTI's Azam Khan Swati.



Pakistan Railways is a major mode of transport in the public sector contributing to the country's economic growth and promoting national integration by carrying people one end to the other through large number of trains running round the clock. At of now, Pakistan Railways owns 466 locomotives (461 diesel engine and five steam engines) to service the 7,791-km route.

The public sector organization has suffered throughout mostly due to acute shortage of resources, due to which the required level of maintenance and rehabilitation could not be maintained despite repeated claims to the contrary. On top of all its problems, it lacked the due priority of the federal government as compared to the road transport.

Figure-wise, Pakistan Railways had 610 locomotives and 23892 freight wagons in 2000-01, which reduced instead going up to 522 locomotives and 17,611 freight wagons in 2011-12 and went further down to 493 locomotives and 14,448 freight wagons in 2019-20. All these years, the route remained unchanged at 7,791 kilometers without any addition whatsoever.

Railways gross earnings in 2000-01 stood at PKR 11.94 billion, which increased to PKR 15.44 billion in 2011-12 and further rose to PKR 47.58 billion in 2019-20.

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Mankind's Final Destiny

A survey of varying Christian perspectives of the end times.

By Azmat M Saqib

Hschatology is the branch of theology concerned with the study of the final events of history and the final judgement or ultimate destiny of the humankind.

Christian visions of apocalypse derive from four major biblical sources: Old Testament prophecy, the Gospels, the New Testament Epistles, and the Book of Revelation. The writers of the New Testament regarded the Jewish prophecies as authoritative but largely misinterpreted by Jewish authorities.

St. Paul explained that even though the Israelites did not recognize Jesus when he came to them, he was, nevertheless, the long-awaited Messiah. Instead of immediately establishing the Kingdom as per the Jewish prophecies, he first had to atone for the sins of the world by dying on the cross.

According to Christians, the Messiah will return to earth to conquer his enemies, restore Israel, and reign for a thousand years.

End times' interpretations in Christianity revolve around, i) a rapture of the church, ii) the antichrist, iii) Great Tribulations, iv) the second coming of the Christ, and v) the "Golden Age" of a thousand year rule known as "Millennium". Beliefs in the prophecies of the Golden Age are termed as "Millenarianism".

The most fundamental question in Christian eschatology has to do with the timing of Christ's return vis-a-vis the Golden Age.

Specifically, will Christ return before the Millennium or after? The two major schools of thought are called Premillennialism and Postmillennialism. A third interpretation Amillennialism is closely associated with Postmillennialism.

Premillennialism holds Christ will return to earth in the future, intervene into human history in a dramatic episode and then set up his Kingdom and bring about the Golden Age.

Postmillennialism, on the other hand, states the Christ's return to the earth will be after the Golden Age and that, rather than an episodic future intervention, Christ is active now through the agency of his Church. The Golden age will be gradually established under the influence of the Church. After this successful period of a millennium, Christ will return to supervise the final judgement of humankind.

Amillennialism takes a similar approach that it does not anticipate Christ's personal intervention until the final judgement. The Roman Catholic Church holds to the amillennial approach, while many churches of the Reformed tradition teach postmillennialism.

Contrary to premillennialism, they both believe that Christ's personal return will be after the Kingdom of God has been established on earth. They believe that this is more a spiritual concept rather than a physical, political concept; and both



believe Christ will return to perform the final judgement and not to rule personally on earth.

In reviewing the End Times terminology, standard premillennialism posits that Christ's second coming will inaugurate a literal thousand-year earthly kingdom. Christ's return will coincide with a time of great tribulation.

At this time, there will be a resurrection of the people of God who are still alive, they will meet Christ at his coming, and a thousand-year peaceful rule will follow. Those who hold to this view usually fall into one of the three categories.

The first is believers of Pretribulation rapture, who believe that the second coming will be in two stages separated by a seven-year period of tribulation. At the beginning of the tribulation, true Christians will rise to meet the Lord in the air or skies (the Rapture).

Then follows a seven-year period of suffering in which the Antichrist will conquer the world and persecute those who refuse to worship him. At the end of this period, Christ returns onto the earth to defeat the Antichrist and establish the age of peace.

Midtribulationists, the second ones believe that the Rapture will take place at the halfway point of the seven-year tribulation, after 3 ½ years. It coincides with the "abomination of desolation"—a desecration of the temple where the Antichrist puts an end to the Jewish sacrifice, sets up his own image in the temple, and demands that he be worshipped as God. This event begins the second most intense part of tribulation.

Posttribulationists, the third ones, believe that Christ will not return until the end of the tribulation. Christians will live through the seven years and suffer for their faith during the ascendancy of the Antichrist. Believers through their final evangelistic effort will try to bring, through Gospel message, great number of converts into the church in time for the beginning of the Millennium.

Postmillennialists hold that Jesus Christ establishes his Kingdom on earth through his preaching and redemptive work in the first century and that he equips his church with the Gospel, empowers her by the spirit, and charges her with the Great Commission to disciple all nations.

Increasing Gospel success will gradually produce a time in history prior to Christ's return in which faith, righteousness, peace, and prosperity will prevail in the affairs of men and of nations. Jesus Christ will return visibly, bodily and gloriously, to end history with the general resurrection and the final judgement after which the eternal order follows.

Postmillennialism was the dominant theological belief among American Protestants who promoted reform movements in the 19th and 20th century.

The Amillennial view regards the "thousand years" as a symbolic number; they believe church age as identical to the millennium, and Christ's reign is spiritual during this millennium. At the end of the church age, Christ will return for final judgement and establish a permanent reign in the new heaven and new earth.

To sum up, Millennialism is the belief that a Golden Age or Paradise will occur on Earth prior to the final judgement and future eternal state of the "World to come". According to the Bible, the millennial age of peace all but closes the history of planet Earth.

But "when the thousand years have expired, Satan will be released from prison and will go out to deceive the nations which are in four corners of the earth – Gog and Magog – and to gather them together to battle, whose number is as the sand on the seashore of the sea." [Rec 20:7-8].

Despite this huge show of force the battle will be short lived. God will "rain down on him and his troops flooding rains, great hailstones fire and brimstone." [Ezek 38:22].



The Last Judgement

Following the defeat of Gog, the last judgement begins: "The devil, who deceived them, was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone where the Beast (the Antichrist) and the False prophet are, and they will be tormented day and night forever and ever" [Rev 20:10]. Satan will join the Antichrist and the False Prophet in this torment, and thrown into Gehenna (Hell).

Those who are included in the Resurrection and the Rapture are exclude from the final judgement, and are not subject to the second death. Due to the description of the seat upon which Lord sits, this final judgement is often referred to as the Great White Throne Judgement.

New Heaven and New Earth, the Eternal state: For behold, I [God] create new heavens and a new earth; and former things will not be remembered or come to mind [Isaiah 65:17]. New Jerusalem, like a bride, will come down out of heaven from God.

He will dwell among men and they shall be His people, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and no longer will there be any death; and no longer will there be any mourning, or crying or pain. And no longer will there be any light for the Glory of God has illuminated the city and its lamp is the Lamb. [Revelation 21:1-5, 21:23].

End Times timeline according to the pretribulation premillennial model is given below, although it contains several terms the explanation of which is beyond the scope of this article.

End Times Timeline

Pretribulation

Rapture (Harpazo)

Judgement Seat (Bema) of Christ

Marriage of the Lamb (the Christ)

Magog Invasion

Battle of Gog and Magog

Tribulation (70th Week of Daniel)

Great Tribulation

Abomination of Desolation

Second Coming (Parousia) of Christ

Battle of Armageddon

Judgement of the Sheep and Goats

Millennium

Marriage Supper of the Lamb

Satan's Final Rebellion (Final War of Gog and Magog)

Great White Throne Judgement

Eternal State

Pakistan & IMF: Peak Geoeconomics

Geoeconomics seems to conspire for an early resolution of the undeclared tiff between Washington DC and Islamabad.



By Mehtab Haider

It seems things are coming to a head for Pakistan's on-again, off-again relationship with the United States to turn a corner one way or the other, and the final round of parleys is being held with Pakistan not by career diplomats from the State Department but by a technical level team of the IMF (International Monetary Fund).

As we go to press, freeing Minister Shoukat Tarin is making a last ditch effort to bring the IMF around to Pakistan's point of view over stringent IMF conditionalities concerning taxation, utility tariffs, subsidies and just about everything touching the everyday life of every Pakistani.

The effort became necessary after technical level parleys between Pakistani and IMF teams remained inconclusive. Tarin is in a tight spot because the deck is loaded against him and he has no chips on the table. He can only use suasion; IMF holds all the levers of persuasion.

A staff level agreement in time to be presented to the executive board by end of November and ahead of Tarin's meetings with the Fund top brass next week will give him a shy at the revival of a USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program.

Apart from the precious forex inflow it represents, a revived program makes several avenues of financing available to Pakistan. On the flip side, it ups the level of hardship for the common Pakistani at a critical inflexion point ahead of the next general election in Pakistan.

A no deal scenario leads to financing drying up or being priced out of reach of Pakistan.

In the process of undertaking number crunching on the macroeconomic front, the IMF staff diagnosed yawning fiscal and current account deficit gaps – whereby corrective measures required to fix the struggling economy of Pakistan.

The budget making 2021-22 proved irrelevant even within the first quarter of the current fiscal year as the floodgates were opened without fully visualizing its consequences. Now the result is quite obvious as the twin deficit has again emerged as a major challenge for the incumbent regime. There are crystal clear signs that the economy had entered into phase of overheating so the IMF's response will be implementing prescription in shape of "Washington Consensus" by implementing one shoe fits for all approach to slow down the economy through tightening of fiscal and monetary policies as well as devaluing the exchange rate and raising the utility prices.

IMF found that there were slippages of around PKR 1000 billion on the revenue front as the petroleum which was budgeted at PKR 610 billion could not be fully realised, as conceded by the economic managers. The IMF team also considered projections related to privatisation proceeds to the tune of PKR 252 billion in the risky zone.

There are some more slippages on the non-tax revenue side so in such circumstances the budget deficit might exceed close to 2 percent of GDP. The primary deficit, which was considered as sacrosanct, was envisaged at 0.7 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year but now the IMF was assessing that it might exceed 1.5 percent and in some cases might go close to 2 percent of GDP till end June 2022.

On external account of economy, the IMF had projected that the current account deficit might go up to USD 12 to USD 14 billion, equivalent to over 4 percent of GDP for the current fiscal year.

The Annual Plan for 2021-22 approved by the Parliament had envisaged to curtail the current account deficit at USD 2.3 billion for the whole financial year after achieving surplus in the last financial year. However, the current account deficit rebounded and rose sharply to touch USD 2.3 billion just in the first two months (July and August) for the current fiscal year. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) had made a fresh projection and estimated that the current account deficit might go up to USD 6.5 billion to USD 9 billion for the current fiscal year.

After establishing rising twin deficits both the budget deficit and the current account deficit by the IMF in the technical level talks, now the IMF tabled a long wish list in the shape of tough conditions to tighten the fiscal and monetary framework as well as raising electricity and gas prices.

On the fiscal front, the IMF asked Pakistan to fetch additional tax revenues of PKR 500 billion, jacking up the FBR's target from PKR 5.8 trillion to PKR 6.3 trillion. The Fund asked for making upward adjustments into Personal Income Tax (PIT) for increasing tax rates for higher income brackets for salaried and non-salaried class.

The General Sales Tax (GST) exemptions for various sectors cost the national exchequer to the tune of PKR 578 billion and the IMF is asking to abolish exemptions to the tune of PKR 250 to PKR 300 billion. The Regulatory Duty (RD) on luxury items is another option under consideration.

Although the imposition of RD can be accomplished through an SRO with the approval of the ECC and the Cabinet, the government will have to present a mini

budget before the Parliament to amend the income tax and sales tax laws. The IMF has suggested the government promulgate an ordinance and then table a bill before the Parliament to pass it with due course of process.

In a bid to tackle the rising current account deficit, the IMF has projected that it might be up to USD 12 to USD 14 billion for the current fiscal year so financing of CAD might get problematic if the remittances recede. However, the remittances have so far kept the momentum, with Pakistan receiving USD 2.7 billion worth in September 2021.

The current account deficit had risen sharply mainly because of a surge in prices of POL products and commodities. The federal government had made a projection that POL prices internationally would be hovering around USD 61 per barrel but the POL prices surpassed USD 71 per barrel on average in the first quarter of the current fiscal year.



The Ministry of Finance high-ups took stance in background discussions that the increased pressure on importing commodities would start receding as one million tons of wheat planned to be imported through government to government (G to G) would be abandoned because the government considered that it possessed sufficient stocks to meet domestic requirements till the arrival of new crop of wheat coming into the market in April/May 2022.

The government is still indecisive whether to import 50,000 tons of sugar or abandon it for having enough stocks to meet domestic requirement till the start of next crushing season by 15 November 2021.

With regard to importing 2 million tons to place strategic reserves, officials say the tie is not right to accomplish that as the prices of the commodity are high in the world market.

In a bid to rectify further deterioration, the IMF has recommended further tightening of monetary policy and jack up discount rate to 8 percent by increasing 50 to 75 basis points from existing rate of 7.25 percent. On exchange rate, the IMF has asked to allow adjustment of currency in line with real effective exchange rate (REER).

The rupee-dollar parity stands at over PKR 172 per dollar and it would remain at around that level barring external shocks. However, it is projected that the REER may require further adjustments of rupee against dollar over the medium term.

The IMF also recommended further jacking up the base price of electricity tariff to the tune of PKR 1.40 per unit in order to curtail the surge in the monster of circular debt.

Pakistani authorities have already implemented a quarterly power tariff but if the base price is not increased, it is feared the Circular Debt Management Plan (CDMP) may not work as envisaged. The IMF wants the NEPRA law amended so the regulator can adjust the tariffs upwards or downwards without government intervention.

With all this on the negotiation table, Pakistan and the IMF high-ups would hold policy level talks from 13 to 15 October just ahead of the annual meeting of Bretton Wood Institutions (BWIs) known as the IMF and World Bank.

Shaukat Tarin's make last ditch effort for staff level agreement with the IMF by striking a balancing act through accepting some demands on fiscal and monetary fronts because for all practical purposes it would be the last reviews for getting a USD 1 billion tranche.

Starting budget 2022-23 (to take effect as of 1 July 2023), the government will enter 'elections mode' when political expediency is prioritised above the real issues of economy, which can be left for the next government to sort out. And thus will continue the boom-bust cycle of Pakistani polity.

Power Sector in the Dock

How can a sector guzzle so much of the nation's precious resources and remain a failure?

By **Khalique Ahmad**

Pakistan's challenges of expensive and inadequate power supplies became quite apparent in the mid-1980s and by early 1990's, there remained no doubt that the status quo was no longer sustainable for the people and the national economy.

To deal with the situation, the Council of Common Interests (CCI) – the forum bringing together leadership of the federation and federating units – approved a strategic plan in 1993 to unbundle the then Water & Power Development Authority (Wapda)'s water and power wings.

The plan required Wapda to retain the then Water Wing while the Power Wing was to be restructured into independent corporate entities concerned with power generation, distribution, and transmission. This followed some privatizations and opening up of the power-gen industry to the private sector.

Almost three decades of so-called reforms, restructuring, unbundling, corporatization,

and tariff increases, Pakistan's power supply remains among the most expensive in the world and a major drain on public finance that is a drag on the national economy as it renders industry uncompetitive.

The lending agencies – the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank in particular – kept on selling their large loan portfolios to the sector and became part of the problem with successive governments throughout this period. In the words of the World Bank itself, Pakistan has continued to suffer from inadequate capacity and other constraints, leading to large and frequent blackouts.

At the heart of the impasse is the so-called “circular debt” crisis, whereby distribution utilities struggling to collect revenues and meet regulatory targets for transmission and distribution losses default on their payments to generators, and the sector is periodically bailed out by the government at high cost to the exchequer as losses accumulate to intolerable levels.

This dynamic weakens the incentive for the DISCOS to improve their efficiency, while discouraging generators from investing in new capacity to address supply shortages. In the meantime, little has been done to accelerate access to electricity to the significant share of the unserved population in rural areas, the World Bank has noted.

The National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (Nepra) has also confirmed that even in just the concluded fiscal year 2020-21, the country's electricity system was marred by underutilization of the most efficient RLNG-fired power plants, increase in circular debt, poor governance, and fuel supply challenges, putting unnecessary burden on consumers.

The growing power sector circular debt is worrying not only for the power sector but also for the whole economy. As of 30 June 2021 circular debt stood at PKR 2.280 trillion as compared to PKR 2.150 trillion a year ago despite hefty payments made to independent power producers.



This increase in the circular debt is detrimental to the financial viability of the power sector. High transmission and distribution losses of DISCOS, lower recovery of the billed amount, and non-payment of subsidies in time are the major causes of circular debt accumulation.

According to the regulator, the biggest challenge currently facing the power sector of Pakistan is the high cost of electricity for which there is no single reason. The unutilized 'Take or Pay' power generation capacity, impact of 'Must Run' power plants, old inefficient power plants, increasing capacity payments, whopping circular debt, weak transmission and distribution system, lack of coordination among relevant power sector stakeholders, improper planning, poor governance, use of primitive technology, taxes, fees and levies in electricity bills etc. are amongst the factors making the price of electricity unaffordable for consumers.

Underutilization of efficient plants is one of the major causes of increase in consumer-end price of electricity. Operating these plants on part load is reducing their efficiency and increasing their Energy Purchase Price (EPP) on the one hand while on the other hand, unutilized capacity is increasing their per unit capacity payment.

Besides under-utilisation of efficient plants, millions of pending new electricity connections, load-shedding despite availability of electric power generation capacity, non-availability of fuel, weak transmission and distribution system as well as poor governance are some major contributing factors for lower utilization of efficient power plants.

During the FY 2020-21, power sector also witnessed the challenge of fuel supply. During the period, the System Operator (SO) reported that it had been conveying its demand for RLNG to concerned quarters well before time but still it could not get the required volume of RLNG and resultantly, on occasions, various RLNG power plants were either unutilized or under-utilized.

RLNG is an imported fuel and its supply is controllable through proper planning and scheduling coupled with an efficient supply chain. Therefore, efforts should be made to improve the supply chain of RLNG so that



non-utilization or under-utilization of efficient RLNG power plants can be avoided.

In case of RLNG, the firm Gas Supply Agreements need to be signed between the parties with back to back agreements so that burden of non-supply of gas could not be passed on to the electricity consumers.

The generation system also continued to bear the brunt of capacity payment for unutilized 'Take or Pay' power generation capacity. The combined installed capacity of intermittent nature electric power generation plants and conventional base load thermal power plants, including Nuclear Power Plants remained around 12,062MW and 27,711MW respectively as of 30 June 2021.

The utilization factor of intermittent nature power plant and base load thermal power plants remained around 41 percent and 45 percent of their respective combined dependable capacities.

The intermittent nature power plants enjoy the priority dispatch condition and in case of non-evacuation of available power from these plants, they are entitled for payment on account of Non-Project Missed Volume (NPMV).

Further, due to 'Take or Pay' contracts, the power plants, despite their low utilization

factor qualify for capacity payments against their full available capacity. The capacity payments to the power generation companies, as verified by CPPA-G, during FY 2020-21 stood at PKR 613.9bn as compared to PKR 611.56bn during FY 2019-20.

The regulator has highlighted that the reduction in consumer price through measures like industrial support package (ISP) and cheaper winter tariff may stimulate economic activity and encourage consumption in the short run. However, for sustainable economic growth, there is a need to curb the inefficiencies in the power sector with proper planning and timely execution of the approved plans so that the cost of electricity for end-consumers can be reduced without burdening the exchequer.

NEPRA has advised the government to immediately undertake an array of measures to arrest the pace of accumulation of circular debt. The measures spelled out include optimal utilisation of efficient electric power generation plants, converting the tariff from 'Take or Pay' to 'Take and Pay' wherever possible, retiring the old GENCOs plants with very low efficiency and utilization and the IPPs having completed term of their licences, improving governance of DISCOS to curb T&D losses, and timely payment of subsidies.

After Tough Times, Tougher Times

Here is why the economy is set to go from bad to worse over the next few months.



By Javed Mahmood

By all accounts, the next three to four months are going to be tough for the Pakistani economy in general and the consumers in particular owing to several independent but interlocking developments likely to further boost price-hike, weaken the rupee, and exacerbate the balance of trade and current account deficit.

In first three months of the ongoing financial year, July-Sept FY22, the country saw a fresh spike in consumer prices, a further slide in the value of the rupee, and broadening trade and current account deficits. Although the Pakistan government has imposed additional regulatory duty on the import of more than 110 items, the desired results may not be achieved before January 2022.

It is because the import orders are normally placed two to four months in advance for their timely delivery. To arrest the trend of rising imports will therefore be next to impossible over the next two or three months.

For example, the latest foreign trade data of Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) showed that the country's trade deficit for the first quarter of FY2021-22 (July-September) had expanded by 100 percent, mounting to USD 11.66 billion as against USD 5.81 billion for the corresponding period of fiscal year 2020-21.

During July-Sept FY22, exports stood at USD 6.96 billion against USD 5.47 billion last year, showing an encouraging 27 percent growth while imports surged 65 percent, racing to USD 18.63 billion. In the corresponding period of last financial year, the national imports stood at USD 11.286 billion.

An encouraging development in September 2021 is that the monthly exports of Pakistan have surged to USD 2.38 billion, up 26.1 percent from USD 1.887 billion in the corresponding period last fiscal. Nonetheless, imports demonstrated a 50.7 percent growth, expanding to USD 6.48 billion in September 2021, up from USD 4.3 billion in September 2020.

However, a disturbing trend in Sept-2021 is that the national trade deficit has widened by 70 percent on a month-on-month basis, reaching USD 4.1 billion as against USD 2.41 billion in the corresponding period last fiscal.

Another foreign trade unexpected development has been that average monthly imports of Pakistan are over and above USD 6 billion, which indicate that in 2021-22, the country's overall import bills will mount to around USD 65-USD 68 billion.

In view of the prevailing external trade trends, Pakistan's trade deficit for FY

2021-22 is expected to clock in at about USD 36 billion, up 16 percent from last fiscal's USD 31 billion. This large deficit would certainly aggravate the current account deficit, already at USD 2.2 billion in first two months of this fiscal.

At the end of 2021-22, despite several measures taken by the government to slow down imports, the current account deficit is being projected well above USD 10 billion, a development that would put pressure on rupee value and drain the foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan.

To overcome unwanted burden of the rising import bill, the government must evaluate national imports every month and devise a strategy to reduce non-essential imports. Otherwise, the yawning trade deficit would continue to worsen current account balance, erode the rupee, burn through the foreign exchange reserves, and encourage dollarization and flight of capital.

Importantly, the current account deficit in the first two months of FY22 expanded to USD 2.2 billion, up from USD 800 million in the corresponding months last fiscal. Resultantly, the rupee value is under constant pressure and dollar is rising again. It had already crossed 171 rupees in October 2021 amid speculation of further deterioration in value of rupee in the weeks ahead.

Fitch on dollar-rupee parity

In financial year 2020-21, the international rating agency first predicted dollar-rupee average exchange rate round 165 rupees in Pakistan during the fiscal year 2021-22. Nevertheless, seeing abrupt deterioration in the value of rupee amid widening trade and current account imbalance, record imports, and inflating international prices of oil, gas, and other essential consumer items, Fitch has downgraded average dollar-rupee exchange rate to around 180 rupees during the ongoing financial year.

However, experts and analysts in Pakistan differ with the prediction of Fitch and they believe that dollar-rupee parity would approach 200 rupees within 2021-22.

Remittances and trade imbalance

In first three months of the current fiscal year (July-Sept 2021), overseas Pakistanis contributed around USD 8 billion in home remittances. In September 2021, the national remittances depicted a meagre growth of 0.5 percent from the corresponding month of 2020.

However, with USD 2.7 billion of inflows during September 2021, workers' remittances reflected a strong momentum, remaining above USD 2.5 billion since June 2020.

According to State Bank of Pakistan, October 2021 is the 7th consecutive month when inflows of remittances were recorded around USD 2.7 billion on average. In terms

of growth, remittances increased by 0.5 percent on month-on-month comparison.

Cumulatively, at USD 8.0 billion, remittances grew by 12.5 percent during the first quarter of this year over the same period last year. Remittance inflows during September 2021 were mainly sourced from Saudi Arabia (USD 691 million), United Arab Emirates (USD 502 million), United Kingdom (USD 370 million) and the United States (USD 245 million).

Proactive policy measures by the Government and SBP to incentivize the use of formal channels, curtailed cross-border travel in the face of Covid-19, altruistic transfers to Pakistan amid the pandemic, and orderly foreign exchange market conditions have positively contributed towards the sustained improvement in remittance inflows since last year.

Importantly, Pakistan has sustained USD 11.8 billion dollars trade deficit in first three months of the ongoing fiscal year and this trade imbalance has, technically, wiped out the impact of inflows of remittances during this period.

This wide trade gap would further magnify the current account deficit for the first quarter. The initial data for the first quarter is expected to be available around 20th of October, 2021, five days after the printing of this magazine.

Dwindling forex reserves

After touching record high level of USD 20.7 billion foreign exchange reserves of

State Bank of Pakistan in last week of August 2021, the reserves are steadily declining because of the above-mentioned developments. In the first week of Oct 2021, the State Bank's reserves have dropped below USD 20 billion and this scenario is expected to prevail further that would weaken the quantum of reserves and value of rupee vis-à-vis dollar and other major currencies.

Spike in oil prices

In recent months, the international crude oil prices have escalated as the world has started opening its borders and airports and lifted lockdowns, leading to increase in consumption of oil and gas. The same trend is prevailing for other essential consumer items such as gas, edible oil, sugar, wheat, coffee.

At present, OPEC crude oil prices per barrel are around USD 78 as against USD 58-60/barrel two months ago, with analysts predicting further increase in oil prices in the weeks ahead.

Analysts, in fact, have also forewarned the consumers of a spike in crude oil price to around USD 90 a barrel by December 2021 because of growing consumption. This means the prices of consumer items will further soar in 2021.

All in all, the people of Pakistan who are already complaining of tough times are about to see tougher times.



After a Pandemic, a Co-Epidemic

Combined with the receding wave of Covid-19, the surging dengue epidemic can spell disaster for Pakistan.

By Noor Aftab

Even as authorities move to return the schools to full strength operations and relax curbs on commercial activity in view of the receding tide of the Covid-19 global pandemic, Pakistan is in the pincer grip of a Covid-Dengue co-epidemic, bringing fresh pressure on the country's derelict healthcare system.

The new challenge has arisen as the dengue virus has once again reared its ugly head in Islamabad, Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KP) provinces. Currently, several parts of the country have been hit by the potentially devastating co-epidemic.

While the data predict that the mosquito-borne disease may strike with full force in the coming days, health experts are demanding of the federal and provincial governments to take necessary preventive steps to minimise the spread of the viral illness.

The latest statistics show that number of dengue virus cases is already on the rise in several parts of the country. For instance, in Rawalpindi, more than 500 patients have so far been treated at public-sector hospitals alone in just two weeks.

The protocols and preventive measures to avoid spread of dengue virus have been in place for the last many years. The most important among them is the prevention of mosquito infestations. Basically, the strategy involves draining stagnant water and ensuring regular fumigation especially in areas more susceptible to viral outbreaks.

Use of insect repellents, wearing long-sleeved garments and sleeping under mosquito nets are also advised to guard against mosquito bites. The recent history of the dengue virus revealed that Lahore was in the grip of the dengue epidemic in 2011.

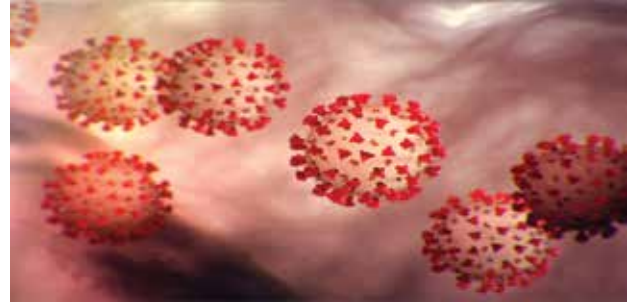
The then Chief Minister of Punjab Shahbaz Sharif resolved to eliminate breeding grounds of mosquitoes by implementing advice from countries like Sri Lanka, which had been engaged in a running battle with dengue. The proven solutions were adopted and, resultantly, the number of cases came down from 21,000 in 2011 to 258 in 2012.

Coinfection

Coinfection of Covid-19 and dengue poses another challenge for accurate diagnosis and treatment of these viral diseases. The initial symptoms of co-infected patients such as fever, aches, and rash are seen to be similar; the distinction can be made as the disease progresses.

Thus, it is difficult to distinguish between dengue and Covid-19 at the initial stage because they manifest similar clinical and laboratory features. Further complications arise when Covid-19 infection gives false-positive results for dengue in the rapid serological tests.

The patients being first incorrectly diagnosed with dengue are later confirmed to be Covid-19. Thus, the new symptom of



Covid-19 has been discovered where the patient is suspected of suffering from dengue fever.

The combination of Covid-19 and dengue is assumed as dangerous for health care system. In fact, coinfection may cause illness with overlapping signs and symptoms that make diagnosis and treatment difficult for health professionals.

Besides, highly accurate, rapid, sensitive, and accessible diagnostic tests are strongly recommended for both Covid-19 and dengue to avoid false-positive results. Continuous surveillance of Covid-19 and dengue patients either single or co-infected with clinical symptoms is also recommended for early and proper recognition of the infecting pathogen.

Covid by numbers

The total number of confirmed coronavirus cases is 1,252,656: Islamabad 105,802; Punjab 433,687; Sindh 460,748; KP 174,841; Balochistan 32,992; Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK) 34,253; and Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) 10,334.

The number of active cases is 45,826: Islamabad 2,268; Punjab 15,690; Sindh 22,801; KP 4,292; Balochistan 161; AJK 468; and GB 146.

In all, 1,178,883 patients have fully recovered from the disease: Islamabad 103,604; Punjab 405,287; Sindh 430,505; KP 164,596; Balochistan 32,482; AJK 33,047; and GB 10,002.

Unfortunately, 27,947 people have lost their lives across the country: Islamabad 929; Punjab 12,710; Sindh 7,442; KP 5,593; Balochistan 349; AJK 738; and GB 186.

A total of 61,538,995 people have got their first dose of the coronavirus vaccine while 31,020,211 are now fully vaccinated in the country. The number of total doses administered in Pakistan is 86,630,655.

Dengue larvae

Official record shows the evidence of dengue larvae has been found in 71,000 households in the Punjab province, most of them in Lahore, Rawalpindi, and Islamabad. The number of dengue cases in Punjab has crossed the 2,000 mark after 173 more people tested positive for the virus on last day of first week of October.

Data shows on average three to five positive cases were emerging in Punjab every day last October. The number for this October is 150 cases. The reason is said to be a lack of surveillance activities and commitment to launch vigorous anti-dengue campaign in Punjab by the health authorities.

Multiple reports are emerging from hospitals that a number of dengue patients are reporting with low platelet counts.

Complications

Medical practitioners say a negative result of the diagnostic tests, either for Covid-19 or dengue fever, does not rule out infections when the clinical symptoms are suggestive, especially in early stages. In patients with several days of symptoms, the probability of finding RT-PCR for dengue positivity is low, since the sensitivity of the test decreases further along the course of illness, as observed in the second case.

It has been seen that RT-PCR tests for SARS CoV-2 can be positive for longer periods, which is an interesting difference compared with direct dengue tests. The dengue virus and Covid-19 coinfection are possible, and should be suspected in dengue endemic areas.

The diagnosis requires a combination of tools, tests for the direct detection of virus, and indirect tests that measure the immune response, in addition to an adequate interpretation of the results according to the clinical and epidemiological particularities of both infections.

Warning or dengue spike

The Pakistan Meteorological Department (PMD) recently warned of a spike in dengue cases in the country. Post-monsoon weather conditions are conducive to the spread of vector-borne illness.

The PMD also pointed out eight major cities – Karachi, Hyderabad, Peshawar, Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, Faisalabad and Rawalpindi – as likely hotspots that will be particularly vulnerable to the onslaught of *Aedes aegypti*, the mosquito species responsible for spreading dengue virus, from 10 October to 20 November.

New fake entries

Three more high-profile fake entries for coronavirus vaccination surfaced involving identity theft of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his deceased wife Kulsoom Nawaz, and former Finance Minister Ishaq Dar.

Another fake entry in the name of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has been made at a vaccination centre in Narowal. The City's Deputy Commissioner said the suspects entered Nawaz Sharif's name in the database using his identity card.

The first fake coronavirus vaccine entry made using the former prime minister's name was at the National Immunization Management System (NIMS) at the Government Kot Khawaja Saeed Hospital on 22 September.

The Punjab Primary and Secondary Healthcare Department moved the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to take action over fake

entries made under the names of Kulsoom Nawaz and Ishaq Dar in the National Immunisation Management System (Nims) – the government's online portal for the issuance of vaccination certificates.

Two health department officials have since been suspended from service and the relevant district health authority's chief executive officer has asked the FIA to register a case against them.

Back to school

The educational activities across the country have finally regained a semblance of normalcy after almost two years of interruptions because of the multiple waves of the coronavirus pandemic.

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC), the nerve centre of the government's unified efforts to stem the pandemic, took this decision in view of the decline in the Covid-19 cases and a stepped-up national vaccination campaign.

Educational activities were closed after coronavirus cases first emerged in the country in February 2020. The classes resumed briefly after some six months but had to be suspended again as the second wave of the disease surfaced towards the end of last year.

A steady decline in the prevalence of Covid-19 has been in evidence in recent weeks. For the past few days, the national Covid-19 positivity ratio has plummeted to below 3 percent.



Emerging challenges

The fourth wave of coronavirus pandemic is apparently heading towards its logical end but the dengue virus outbreak is likely to mount pressure on the healthcare system.

Many experts have pointed out that the Punjab government has not taken appropriate measures during pre-monsoon and monsoon season due to which the dengue virus has raised its head in many cities of the province.

Under the protocols laid down years ago, provincial governments are required to come up with their plans to control dengue virus by June every year. In next three months they implement their respective plans to control the disease. It does not seem like the practice was followed this year. Now the emerging situation underlines the need for immediate measures that can ensure protection of the people from this disease.



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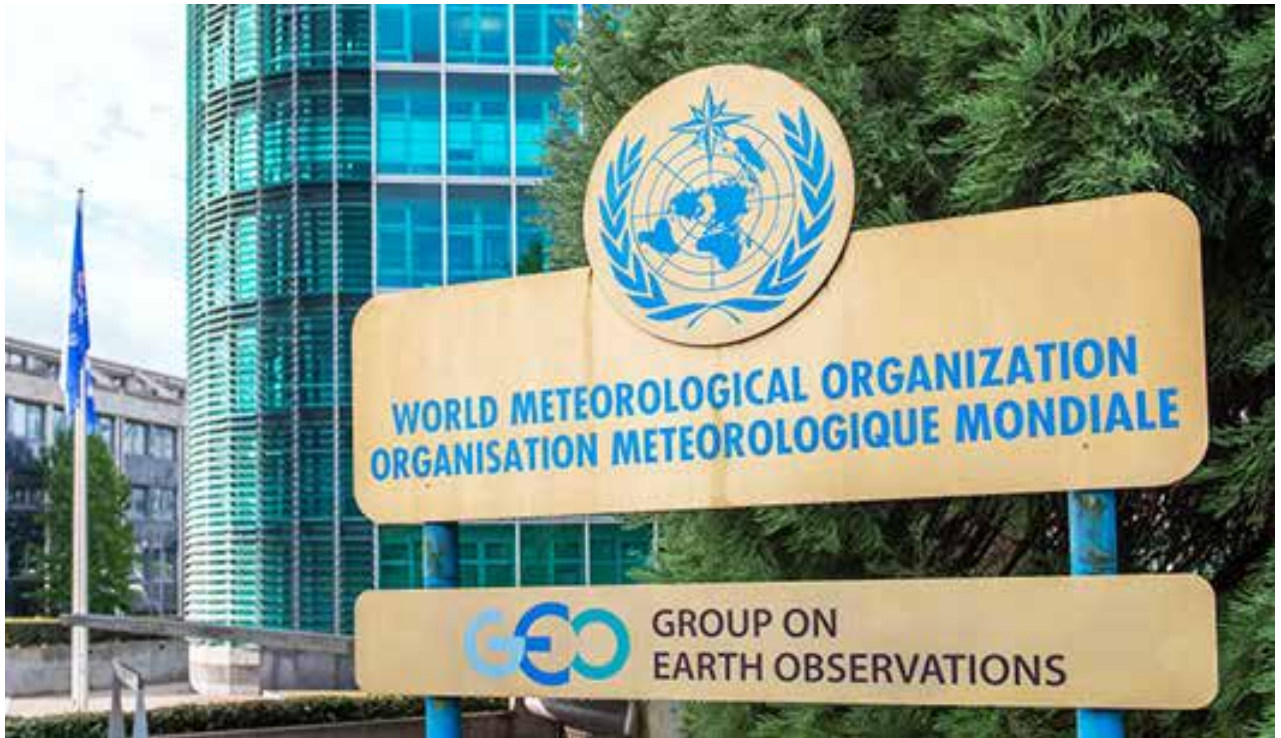
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Why is Humanity's Fight Against Climate Change Under-Resourced?

COP26 may well be our last chance to get climate finance right.



By Ahmer Kureishi

Evidence of the climate disaster that is almost upon us being human-made keeps piling up on almost a daily basis, but inexplicably, governments and societies worldwide are either not doing enough or doing nothing at all to avert the impending crisis of biblical proportions.

Evidence of the realization that urgent and concrete climate action is not a luxury but a dire necessity for human kind is sketchy at best. Many people in many places – including some government leaders – are making the right noises. But when it comes to action, the same government leaders leave much to be desired.

Take, for example, the recent report by the United Nation World Meteorological Organisation. Titled “2021 State of Climate Services: Water”, the report presents the findings of a WMO assessment covering 101 WMO Member countries (101) for which data are available. All five assessment findings uncover lack of adequate action on the part of the official sector.

Five findings

The WMO assessment found that:

1. There is inadequate interaction among climate services providers and information users in 43 percent of WMO Members;
2. Data is not collected for basic hydrological variables in approximately 40 percent of WMO members;
3. Hydrological data is not made available in 67 percent of WMO members;
4. End-to-end riverine flood forecasting and warning systems are absent or inadequate in 34 percent of WMO members that provided data – with only 44 percent of Members’ existing systems reaching more than two-thirds of the population at risk; and
5. End-to-end drought forecasting and warning systems are lacking or inadequate in 54 percent of WMO

Members that provided data – with only 27 percent of Members’ existing systems reaching more than two-thirds of the population at risk.

“Achieving the adaptation objectives in developing countries’ NDCs will require significant additional financial commitments”, say the executive summary of the report. “Yet, several constraints limit countries’ capacity to access financing, including low capacities for developing and implementing projects, and difficulties to absorb resources within low-income countries’ public financial systems.

“Despite a 9 percent increase in financial pledges made to tackle SDG 6, official development assistance (ODA) commitments remained stable at US\$ 8.8 billion, despite increased funding needs to meet targets under the SDG6 – between 2015 and 2019.”

UNFCCC connection

The WMO report has appeared every year since 2019 pursuant to a call in

2018 by the 24th Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) through its Global Framework for Climate Services (GFCs) to the effect that it regularly report on the state of climate services with a view to “facilitating the development and application of methodologies for assessing adaptation needs”.

In a message accompanying the report, WMO Secretary-General Prof. Petteri Taalas says lack of water continues to be a major cause of concern for many nations, especially in Africa. More than two billion people live in water-stressed conditions and lack of access to safe drinking water and sanitation, he says, noting water-related hazards have been increasing in frequency for the past two decades overall.

“There is good news, however”, says Prof Taalas. “Most nations are determined to improve the way water is managed, with the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) reporting that water is a top adaptation priority in the vast majority (79%) of Parties’ Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs) to the Paris Agreement.

The WMO report highlights and explores – through data, analysis, and a series of case studies – how nations can improve water resource management and reduce the impacts of water-related disasters through better climate services and end-to-end early

warning systems – supported by sustainable investments.

In his message, Prof Taalas warns time is not on our side, noting how the latest Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) report is a stark reminder that catastrophic heatwaves, droughts and flooding will increase in frequency and severity if we fail to act now.

Released earlier this year, the IPCC report confirmed stark warnings of human-induced global warming, but said we can halt and possibly reverse the rise in temperatures by cutting global emissions in half by 2030 and reach net zero by the middle of this century.

Almost every nation on Earth is signed up to the goals of the 2015 Paris Climate Agreement that aims to keep the rise in global temperatures well below 2°C this century and to pursue efforts to keep it under 1.5 °C. But the IPCC report said both targets would be breached this century under all the emissions scenarios considered by the scientists – unless huge cuts in carbon take place – which is again a question of mobilising resources.

“Climate services and early warning systems give us a vital opportunity to prepare and react in a way that can save many lives and protect livelihoods and communities across the world”, says Prof Taalas.

SDG 6

Sustainable Development Goal 6 (SDG 6 or Global Goal 6) is about clean water and sanitation for all. It is one of 17 SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals) established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. The official wording of SDG6 is: “Ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all”.

The goal has eight targets to be achieved by at least 2030. Progress toward the targets is measured by using eleven indicators.

Some people find it difficult to visualise water as a diminishingly scarce resource given the fact that over 70% of the earth’s surface is covered by water. They need to remember that only 0.5% of water on Earth is useable and available freshwater useable for drinking, cooking, and sanitation.

Human- and naturally-induced stressors are increasingly adding pressure on the planet’s freshwater resources, access to which is a key prerequisite to human development. In the past 20 years, terrestrial water storage – the sum of all inland water whether surface or subsurface, including soil moisture, snow, and ice – has been lost at a rate of 1cm per year.

The WMO report says Integrated Water Resources Management (IWRM) is vital to achieving long-term social, economic and



environmental well-being. The problem, however, is that although most countries have advanced their level of IWRM implementation, 107 countries remain off track to hit the goal of sustainably managing their water resources by 2030, as set out in SDG 6).

The report highlights that in 2020, 3.6 billion people lacked safely managed sanitation services, and 2.3 billion lacked basic hygiene services. The current rates of progress need to quadruple in order to reach the global target of universal access by 2030 – which brings us back to the question of resources, and again, we see many words spoken but scant action taken.

Climate finance

The WMO report says climate finance reached an annual average of US\$ 574 billion in 2017–2018, an annual increase of 24% compared to 2015-2016 levels. However, just 5% of the global climate finance portfolio was allocated for climate adaptation initiatives.

Annual adaptation finance to the water sector was US\$ 10 billion in 2017-2018 on average. A further US\$ 0.8 billion was channelled to projects in the water sector targeting both mitigation and adaptation benefits.

In 2020, Multilateral Development Banks provided US\$ 16.1 billion in total adaptation funding, out of which US\$ 2.7 billion was invested in water and wastewater systems projects, accounting for just 14% of the total MDB investment in adaptation projects in low- and middle-income economies.

Official Development Assistance (ODA) specifically for SDG 6 increased by 9% over the period between 2015 to 2019 in terms of financial commitments. Yet actual ODA disbursements to the water sector remained stable at US\$ 8.8 billion, despite increased funding needed to meet SDG 6 targets under the SDG6.

Only about 3% of total water sector ODA goes to water resources conservation, encompassing data collection; creation and sharing of water knowledge; conservation and rehabilitation of inland surface waters (rivers, lakes, etc.), ground water and coastal waters; and the prevention of water contamination.



Six recommendations

The report makes six strategic recommendations to improve the implementation and effectiveness of climate services for water worldwide. These are:

1. Invest in Integrated Resources Water Management as a solution to better manage water stress, especially in Small Island Developing States (SIDS) and Least Developed Countries (LDCs);
2. Invest in end-to-end drought and flood early warning systems in at-risk LDCs, including for drought warning in Africa and flood warning in Asia;
3. Fill the capacity gap in collecting data for basic hydrological variables which underpin climate services and early warning systems;
4. Improve the interaction among national level stakeholders to co-develop and operationalize climate services with information users to better support adaptation in the water sector. There is also a pressing need for better monitoring and evaluation of socio-economic benefits, which will help to showcase best practices;
5. Fill the gaps in data on country capacities for climate services in the water sector, especially for SIDS;
6. Join the Water and Climate Coalition¹¹ to promote policy development for integrated water and climate assessments, solutions and services, and benefit from a network of partners that develop and implement tangible, practical projects, programs and systems to improve hydroclimate services for resilience and adaptation.

Glasgow's COP26

With COP26 just round the corner, the WMO has come as an invaluable addition to expanding the body of knowledge presenting compelling evidence of climate change being human made. It underlines the urgency of climate action, and, perhaps more to the point, the urgency of garnering and mobilising resources.

These calls should amplify earlier calls aired by leading climate activists and representatives of developing countries to goad the developed nations into meeting their climate finance pledge ahead of COP26 to keep international climate negotiations on track.

COP26 – the 26th United Nations Climate Change Conference – is scheduled to take place in Glasgow from 31 October to 12 November 2021 under the presidency of the United Kingdom.

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

Responding to the IPCC report, Scotland's Net Zero Secretary Michael Matheson was reported as saying, "We will carefully consider the latest advice contained in the report and encourage others to do so too", said Matheson – and he warned, "We will not get many more warnings before time runs out".

Here is hoping getting climate finance right is high on the agenda of COP26 – widely believed to be one of humanity's last chances to take action to prevent the worst impacts of climate change.

Courting Climate Disaster

High on the list of climate-vulnerable countries, Pakistan can ill afford inaction in the face of the approaching climate apocalypse.



By Sara Hayat

In Pakistan, climate migration has become a growing reality. Not only is Pakistan consistently ranked among the top 10 most climate-vulnerable countries in the world, it is also not acting fast enough to combat the daily impacts of climate change. These range from erratic weather patterns and heatwaves to glacial lake outburst floods (GLOFs) that endanger and displace entire communities.

63 million Number of people who could be displaced by climate change by 2050 in South Asia

The country has much to boast of in terms of its diverse topographic splendour. But many of its celebrated glaciers, rivers and deserts, coupled with overpopulation, have become a noose, steadily tightening around citizens, as global greenhouse gas emissions drive global warming to fatal degrees and trigger natural disasters.

A report from December 2020, 'Costs of Climate Inaction: Displacement and Distress Migration', puts South Asia's

climate migration crisis into perspective through numbers. It states that in 2020, more than 18 million people in the region were climate migrants. If global warming continues on its current trajectory and the global average temperature rises by 3.2 degrees Celsius, almost 63 million people will be displaced in Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka. Pakistan alone is expected to have around 2 million climate migrants by 2050, not including those who will be displaced due to the sudden onset of climate disasters, such as floods and cyclones.

To give an idea of the scale of the problem, the overpopulated city of Lahore is currently home to around 11 million people. This means that in less than 30 years, the number of people who need a new place to live in South Asia may be six times the current population of Pakistan's second-largest city.

Most climate migrants are, and will be, displaced from rural areas and the coastal belt of Pakistan. Once in urban centres, climate migrants are likely to experience additional social hardships in the form of

discrimination, competition for employment and precarious living conditions.

Climate change upends livelihoods

According to the 2017-18 Labour Force Survey, 39% of Pakistan's population is dependent on agriculture, livestock-rearing and fisheries as the main source of livelihood. All of these are adversely impacted by climate change. Poverty is the strongest determinant for vulnerability to climate change, and also a major reason for displacement.

China and the US are unquestionably expediting climate change (as the world's two biggest emitters of greenhouse gases, they are responsible for 27% and 11% of emissions, respectively), and Pakistan is quick to point out that it is not a big polluter. But being low on the global emissions list does not absolve the national government of its responsibilities to adapt to the domestic climate crisis.

Flawed and inequitable domestic government policies have fuelled the intensity of

the global climate crisis in Pakistan. Climate migration from large tracts of Sindh and Balochistan is due to the absence of fresh water, without which locals cannot grow crops, rear animals or meet their daily domestic needs. However, the government's stance to managing Pakistan's water crisis remains the construction of more dams upstream, which will literally turn the southern parts of the country into barren wasteland.

Unless fresh water is released into the Indus upstream and allowed to flow to the Arabian Sea while carrying sediments, the intrusion of sea water will render the Indus Delta and its accompanying region infertile and uninhabitable.

A documentary called Natari ('anchor') brings to life the plight of climate migrants in Kharo Chan, a village in the internationally revered, yet locally destroyed, Indus Delta. One interviewee identifies the government's discriminatory policy of building dams to serve the agricultural needs of a few provinces while Sindh starves, and says: "They talk about building a dam, but the river doesn't even reach the sea."

Pakistanis contribute less than 0.8% to global greenhouse gas emissions and are

not responsible for climate change; on top of this, inequitable government policies have stolen their homes and livelihood.

Women bear the brunt of climate migration in Pakistan

There are no women in Natari. Even after multiple requests by the production team, men in Kharo Chan would not permit any interviews or footage of women and girls from their families. A woman's plight, no matter how severe, remains hidden behind closed doors.

Yet climate change-induced migration in Pakistan impacts women disproportionately. It impacts their physical and emotional health and wellbeing, increases their domestic workload, hampers mobility and eliminates earning opportunities (most rural women work in the agricultural domain).

A 2019 Oxfam report, 'Climate Induced Migration in Sindh, Pakistan', identifies the everyday difficulties female climate migrants face. These include heightened exposure to wild animals, snakes and vector-borne diseases, vulnerability and sexual harassment, non-existent privacy and the constant emotional turmoil of having to leave their homes.

Dignified movement, not just towards a glittering city but towards a safer future, should be the right of every climate migrant

In Pakistan, where climate migration itself is absent from national discourse, its impacts on women hardly cross the minds of policymakers. The solution to tackling the problem holistically is rooted in gender-responsive policies and their implementation. This will be possible after the government invests in and collects high-quality, grassroot-level and gendered data.

Every climate migrant's dream has been replaced with a nightmarish struggle for survival. Their painful, real-life stories in documentaries such as Natari are just one way to raise awareness and influence policymakers.

We cannot reverse climate change, but we can put in place effective resilience measures, equitable water management, gendered adaptation and disaster-relief policies and social-protection measures, including those that help diversify sources of livelihood for women affected by climate change. Dignified movement, not just towards a glittering city but towards a safer future, should be the right of every climate migrant.





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Fireworks at National T20 Cup as Prep for T20 World Cup

England and New Zealand eat your heart out, Pakistanis continue to eat, sleep, and breathe cricket.

By Ali Abdullah

If anyone had suspected Pakistanis preoccupation with cricket would weaken after two international sides pulls out of their tours, they now stand corrected. If anything, the nation of cricket maniacs has taken to the support with even more abandon.

After a disappointing end to the international calendar for Pakistan, Pakistan Cricket Board decided to shift the first leg of National T20 Cup to Rawalpindi Cricket Stadium. Domestic and national players took part in the tournament, the last cricket event before the T20 World Cup.

Ramiz Raja, the newly appointed Chairman PCB, said ahead of the event broadcasting for the tournament will be of international level. No doubt he made sure there would be no compromise over it.

The National T20 Cup 2021 began with a low scoring yet entertaining contest between Balochistan and Northern. Right from the beginning, Balochistan were nowhere in the game. They began slowly, then kept losing wickets consistently. At one point Balochistan were 70/5, but then Amad Butt and Kashif Bhatti provided some resilience.

Balochistan finished at 139/7 at the end of their 20 overs thanks to a 66 run partnership between Amad Butt and Kashif Bhatti. Every bowler from Northern was good, but the pick of the bowlers were Haris Rauf and Mohammad Nawaz who grabbed 2 wickets each and remained economical as well.

Northern had no trouble whatsoever in the run chase. They did lose Umar Amin early, but it proved beneficial for them as Haider Ali did something unexpected. After a terrible CPL, Haider Ali stunned everyone with a 28 ball half century.

Asif Ali was the second batter to set off some fireworks apart from Haider, who smashed 43 off just 20 balls. The game ended with Northern winning by 6 wickets and 3 overs to spare.

As usual there were questions regarding the selection of T20 World Cup team. Ever since the team was announced, Pakistan Cricket Board and chief selector Muhammad Wasim seemed under immense pressure. They had time to change the team till 8 October to give the final name to the ICC.

The Pakistan squad for the World T20 2021 has been revised by the PCB based on the players' performance in the national T20 Cup. It was announced that the squad would go in quarantine at Lahore from 8 October 2021, so any changes in the squad had to be done before 8 October. The team is set to depart for UAE on 15 October.

Opening batter Fakhar Zaman has replaced Khushdil Shah in the squad. Although generally, Fakhar's role is to open the innings but we've seen recently that Pakistan used him in the



middle order in T20Is. Khushdil Shah's form was questionable in the National T20 Cup. He did show some spark in the PSL 2021, but he struggled afterwards.

Khushdil is said to be one dimensional player, as he looks terrible while playing deliveries outside the off stump. On the other hand, Fakhar Zaman's experience and match winning performances have given him an edge over Khushdil Shah.

Fakhar was earlier in the travelling reserves of Pakistan squad for the World T20 2021, but now he has been named in the final 15.

Former skipper Sarfaraz Ahmed has been rewarded for his brilliant performances in the National T20 Cup 2021. He was also in good rhythm during Pakistan Super League.

Azam Khan on the other hand was out of shape and out of form. His fitness has been questionable. He got run out a couple of times in the National T20 Cup 2021 and on the whole failed to deliver any notable performance in the tournament.

Even behind the stumps, Azam missed a few chances. Hence the experienced wicketkeeper-batter Sarfaraz Ahmed was chosen ahead of Azam. Sarfaraz would be the backup wicket keeper choice of Pakistan for the World T20 2021 now.

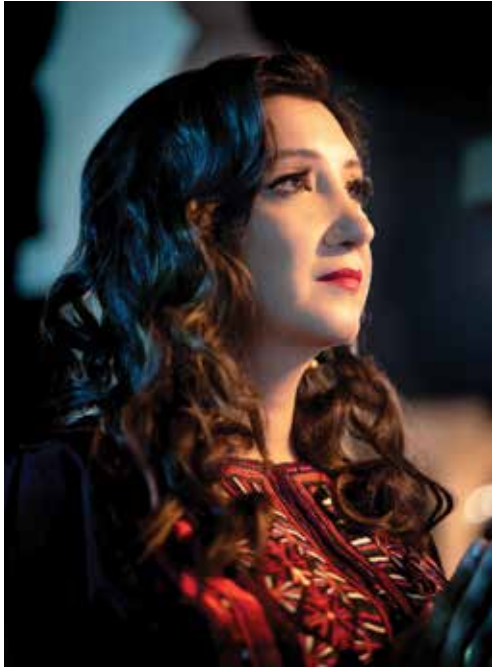
Muhammad Hasnain was named in the 15-member squad but his performances in the national T20 were below average. Haider Ali, the in-form batter, replaced him after his brilliant performances in the tournament – although he failed miserably in the CPL.

Shoaib Malik, who had earlier been left out, is set to make a comeback for the tour. Sohaib Maqsood who was picked over Malik has unfortunately been ruled out due to back injury. On 9 October, it was announced Shoaib Malik has been picked.

After these changes in the squad the team is looking much stronger than before and according to experts this team is a good fighting unit that has the potential to surprise the opposition.

Pak-Afghan Duo Sings for the Forlorn Singers of Afghanistan

Pakistani singer Zeb has teamed up with an expat Afghan crooner to voice support for the artistes struggling to stay alive under the Taliban's draconian rule.



By Hasan Kazmi

Pakistani and Afghan singers have come together in an artistic endeavour to express solidarity with Afghan artists and musicians who are yet again facing a repressive regime that has the audacity to announce a blanket ban on liberal and performing arts, especially music.

The Taliban captured Kabul on 15 August 2021, and one of the first steps they took to implement their interpretation of sharia, even before the complete US evacuation, was that they enforced blanket ban on music and female voices on television and radio.

Since then, there have been numerous reports about how musical instruments are being destroyed across the country, and how many artists have fled the country or are ready to leave.

In times of such uncertainty and crisis, in a bid to celebrate Afghan cultural heritage and music, a Pakistani and Afghan singer have teamed up to send love letters to Kabul using the universal language of music.

Renowned Pakistani singer Zeb Bangash joined hands with Canada-based Afghan singer Shumali Afghan to create this musical letter of love to Kabul, a song in Dari named Yaar Dami Bashno, or 'Love Letters to Kabul'.

Zeb, who has also sung a few songs for Bollywood, earned her name in music during the last many years in Pakistan. Shumali Afghan, who belongs to a musician family of Afghanistan, and had moved to Canada as an adolescent.

"Me and Shumali were scheduled to do a song in Coke Studio before the pandemic hit the world", Zeb told The Truth International (TTI). "The Coronavirus prevented us from doing so. However, when Shumali visited Pakistan in December 2020, we recorded together, which was actually a tribute to the folk music of Afghanistan".

One of their songs is Dari whereas two other songs are in Pashto, Zeb added.

The song in Dari is the composition of one of the renowned musicians of Afghanistan, Ustad Ghulam Dastagir Shida, who also introduced a Bollywood touch in the Afghan traditional music.

Explaining the context of "Love Letter to Kabul", Zeb said that the song was a melancholic one, in which a lover is trying to get attention of his beloved by sending a message to have mercy on him and if not meeting at least listen about his pain.

Zeb further explained she wanted to bring a beautiful thing from Kabul in these times. "I know that when there is turmoil in any country, people all over the world discuss that country with only one aspect, ignoring its beautiful history and tradition".

In the context of the current situation in Afghanistan, which developed after the Taliban takeover of Kabul, Zeb said, "When I saw people fleeing from the country in distress, I realised that Afghanistan was going to be just a flashing news for the rest of the world.

“Then I decided to present something from my side which is related to tradition, history and spirituality of this region. I had earlier decided to release ‘Love Letter to Kabul’ in October but due to recent events in the country, it was released a month earlier.”

The two Pashto songs will be released soon, she added.

Zeb believes the current situation is very difficult for the art and artists in Afghanistan, and a continuation of the circumstances of the 1980s during the Afghan war when artists had to seek refuge in Pakistan.

“Artists are the most sensitive section of any society”, says the crooner. “They are affected the most in this type of crisis, but at the same time they are the most resilient species.”

Zeb hopes for peace and harmony for Afghanistan and its people in these difficult times. “I am an artist and always wish to keep my connection with the public.”

She is unbending that art can never be suppressed, and if suppressed, it springs back with even more force. “So when people get a beautiful thing from an artist, they naturally give feedback. This is inevitable. Culture never dies.”



Speaking from Canada, Shumali Afghan, told The Truth International (TTI) he wanted to bring back the real taste of cultural music created in the 1970s Kabul.

“Back in 1979, my father Ustad Shahwali Afghan used to sing these songs at Zeb’s home, when the Soviet Union took over Afghanistan and a vast majority of musicians came to the city of Peshawar in Pakistan for their livelihood. Zeb and I wanted to connect back and sing these classical songs once sung by our elders at her house.”

Afghan also wishes to give a try to an Urdu duet with Zeb someday.

“It might be at my family home! Yes family home where all our elders used to gather for musical evenings. Smiles! Also Zeb is helping me to pronounce Urdu words correctly so that I can sing some good Urdu songs in the future.”

The singer is too bothered about these difficult times in Afghanistan, and hope the people will get out of it soon, “Indeed our brothers and sisters are going through rough and tough times in Kabul, displaced, struggling to find a way out. But I am hoping they can settle down in the neighbouring countries in these trying times.”



Film Industry Bailout Must Cover Producers, says Adnan Siddiqui

The actor-producer tells TTI all about the Pak-Turk coproduction on the life of the legendary Salahuddin Ayyubi.



By Kaukab Jahan

Adnan Siddiqui is a well-known name in the Pakistani entertainment industry. Not only are his acting skills recognized in Pakistan but he has also worked in Bollywood and Hollywood with their leading artists. Besides acting, he also has been producing dramas for television.

These days, he is busy in the pre-production of a series on Sultan Salahuddin Ayyubi, the famed 12th century Muslim warrior. It is a joint venture between Pakistan and Turkey. The series is planned to be produced in three seasons, each comprising almost 34 episodes.

The Truth International talked to Adnan Siddiqui about this series exclusively and his other plans.

TTI: Are you doing the lead role of Salahuddin Ayyubi?

AS: No. Not at all. I am not playing this role. It will be played by a Turkish actor. The name would be announced soon.

Moreover, only 25 percent of the cast of the series would be selected from Pakistan while the rest includes actors from Turkey. A Turkish team would come to Pakistan in the first week of October for casting. The whole project would be filmed under the supervision of Turkish director Emre Konuk.

TTI: So, which character are you supposed to play in the series?

AS: I cannot tell anything about it at the moment. They have a strict rule of audition before casting any actor for specific roles. I also would follow that rule and only after audition will it be decided if I am suitable for any role in the series.

TTI: Are the governments from both the countries (Pakistan and Turkey) involved in this project?

AS: No. The project is not supported by any government financially. The series is being produced by a Pakistani Dr Kashif

Ansari, who lives in USA and Dr Junaid Ali Shah from Karachi. Humayun Saeed and I are the executive producers of the series. But as far as the logistic assistance is concerned, the government would definitely be involved like helping in providing NOCs to shoot our project.

TTI: Tell us about the series production plan?

AS: This first season is going to be shot entirely in Turkey, for which the preparations are in their final stages while some parts of the second season would be filmed in Pakistan by a Turkish crew, who would visit Pakistan. Honestly, at the moment, for me, the initiation of the project is more important than anything else as many people are showing their doubts about its implementation. I am very much hopeful about it.

TTI: Where would the series be aired?

AS: It has not yet been decided on which

television channel the series will be aired, but I wish it to be run in both countries simultaneously.

TTI: What would be the language of the series?

AS: It is very interesting. The series would include both the languages. Pakistani actors would dialogue in Urdu while the Turkish cast would perform in their language. Then, both the languages would be dubbed in Turkish and Urdu respectively for the audience in both the countries. Moreover, the whole series will be dubbed in various other languages of the world along with English.

TTI: Salahuddin Ayyubi is a historical drama. So what would be the criterion of selection of the actors and would there be any training for them before going on sets?

AS: Yes. Every actor would be selected only after an audition. The selected cast then would be sent to Turkey for training which include horse riding, pegging and fencing.

TTI: You have produced the film 'Dum Mastum'. When is it going to be released?

AS: The film is ready. We are waiting to get the epidemic of Covid 19 over and to reopen the cinema completely. The story of Dum Mastum is written by actor Amar Khan who is also doing the lead role in the film along with Imran Ashraf. The film is directed by Muhammad Ehteshamuddin.

TTI: A new iteration of our fledgling film industry was just emerging from the ground after the demise of the Lahore-based traditional film industry when the Covid-19 global pandemic struck, forcing cinemas into closure. How do you think we can revive it?

AS: Yes. Definitely, our film industry is taking its last breath. It needs oxygen. It would be done so that whenever cinemas reopen after the COVID, we should not give any other reason to close them down. There should be a proper code of conduct for this.

I strongly believe that to revive the industry again, we must strengthen film producers and production houses. If the government makes any law to exempt cinema houses from taxes, then it must also enable and empower be producers. We need a coherent film policy at the moment.



Pakistan's King of Comedy Dies at 61

Umar Sharif dealt in laughter all his life. It is apt that his death has left us all in tears.

By Sarfraz Raja

He was the king of comedy, the master of laughter, Mr Charlie, Mr 420: Actor, writer, director, producer, and television host.

Long before that, in 1974, he was a teenaged kid from Karachi who started his career as a stand-up comedian. Those were the times when the public used to listen to such acts on audio cassettes. Yes, this was the legendary Umar Sharif.

Sharif got his ultimate fame as a stage comedian in 1980s with his mega hit stage plays Bakra Qiston Pe and Budha Ghar Pe Hy. Those two blockbuster hits made him a household name not only in Pakistan but also among Urdu speaking audiences worldwide.

That was the era of big-budget Bollywood movies and superstars like Amitabh Bachan reigned supreme. Umar Sharif's stage dramas gave a successful competition to those Bollywood super hits and videocassettes of his dramas got more business than many Bollywood movies of that time.

Umar Sharif became a comedy brand and success symbol. Ultimately, his comedy magic made its way to the silver screen where flicks like Mr Charlie and Mr 420 provided viewers memorable entertainment and proved a milestone in revival of Pakistan's dying film industry.

Umar Sharif was blessed with some God gifted talent and was popular for his witty dialogue. He was equally appreciated across the border and was such a popular personality in Indian showbiz world that he always remained important and inevitable participant and performer in top award shows of Bollywood. Many Indian entertainers over the years came to regard Sharif as their mentor.

An illustrious career spanning nearly five decades saw him being widely hailed as Pakistan's king of comedy. He performed all

around the globe in number of countries and was equally popular everywhere.

He hosted some of the most popular TV shows of its time like The Sharif show.

Umar Sharif had been battling cardiac ailments. Prior to his death, Umar Sharif had appealed to Prime Minister Imran Khan to facilitate his visit to US for further treatment. His appeal came on 9 September 2021.

But could not leave the country for surgery until three weeks later due to hurdles in visa issues, release of finances, and availability of air ambulance. It was on 28 September 2021 when Umar Sharif could finally depart for the US from Pakistan via an air ambulance.

He was scheduled to leave for the United States on 25 September but it was delayed as his health condition deteriorated hours before the scheduled departure and the doctors declared his heart condition critical and not safe for travelling.

Finally, the air ambulance carrying him and his wife Zareen Umar departed from Karachi on 28 September. But it was too late by then. His health deteriorated during a stopover in Germany. He was rushed to a hospital where he succumbed to complications after his blood pressure dropped during a dialysis and he could not survive.

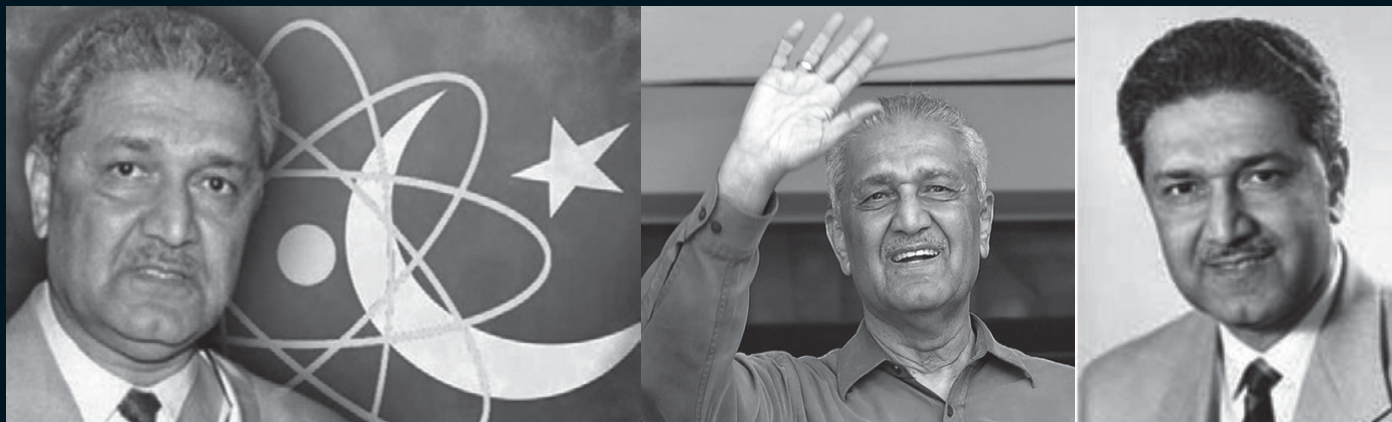
Umar Sharif left suddenly and too early when he was only 61. His fans always had great expectations from him and he always met those.

He won dozens of awards and millions of hearts. He was a living legend and death makes him immortal. His life made every one laugh and his death left all in tears.

Rest in peace legend, rest in peace Umar Sharif.



Dr Khan planned to challenge MDCAT hours before his death



ISLAMABAD: Some 11 hours before his death, nuclear scientist Dr Abdul Qadeer Khan had disclosed to Dawn that he would challenge in court the flawed entry tests for admission to medical and dental colleges.

“I am going to file a petition on Monday in Islamabad High Court to challenge a faulty MDCAT (medical students’ admission test) because it has destroyed future of hundreds of thousands of students.”

These were the remarks Dr Khan made on Saturday evening while talking to Dawn on the matter related to results released by the Pakistan Medical Commission (PMC). This showed the amount of concern he had for problems faced by the common man and, in this particular case, the miseries of candidates who were asked by the PMC to ignore the initial results.

He was of the opinion that the government had introduced a faulty Medical and Dental Colleges Admission Test (MDCAT) that endangered the future of medical students in the country.

According to a media report, the PMC announced that around 125,000 candidates — 65 per cent overall — had failed to get the passing marks.

This scribe received Dr Khan’s phone call at 6.28pm on Saturday in which the nuclear scientist said he was quite disturbed because of the future of medical students and, therefore, he decided to challenge the issue in the IHC.

About his health, Dr Khan in a strained voice said he had returned home after

having Covid 19 treatment at the hospital, though he was still not feeling well. “I have pain in my whole body,” he added.

As the scientist who made the country an atomic power is no more, it is uncertain whether his family will pursue his petition or not.

Earlier, Dr Khan told Dawn that he was not happy with the present rulers for not inquiring after his health when he was hospitalised due to Covid-19. In his recent letter to incumbent Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, Dr Khan had conveyed his displeasure over the federal government’s attitude.

“Such a nice feeling that the PM & CM of Punjab, KPK and Balochistan are waiting to hear good news of my demise,” he wrote.

Dr Khan, born in 1936 in Bhopal, India, saw rise and downfall in his life, but he came in hot water after Pakistan conducted nuclear tests in 1998. Since then, he had to lead a difficult life with what the authorities called “protective” custody at his own E-7 residence along with his Dutch wife Henny Khan.

Beyond exaggeration, Dr Khan can be called “good morning” man for his friends and fans as he used to send good wishes messages before sunrise after offering Fajr prayer. Silence from his cell phone on Sunday was shocking for many, as he could not sprinkle good wishes to people before the news of his demise broke at around 7am.

He will be remembered not only for being the architect of Pakistan nuclear programme but also for his contribution to the education and social welfare sectors. According to his family sources, he and his wife were running more than 100 education

and social welfare institutions across the country, especially in remote areas.

Dr Khan had immigrated along with his family to Pakistan in 1947 after partition of the subcontinent. He earned a science degree at Karachi University in 1960 before going to Berlin for studying metallurgical engineering and proceeding to the Netherlands and Belgium to complete advanced studies.

In 1974, he joined Pakistan nuclear programme, dreamt by then prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, founded the Khan Research Laboratories in 1976 where he served as its chief scientist and director for many years.

When India conducted nuclear tests in 1998, the whole nation was waiting for a robust response from Pakistan and finally under his supervision the nuclear tests were conducted in Chagai, Balochistan.

Dr Khan was a rare national hero who received three top civil awards as recognition of his services to the country and made its defence insurmountable. They were Hilal-i-Imtiaz that he received in 1989, followed by Nishan-i-Imtiaz once in 1996 and then again in 1999.

He is the author of many research papers and publications. Some of them are: In 1972 *Advances in Physical Metallurgy* (in English, German and Dutch), *Metallurgical Thermodynamics and Kinetics* (in English, German and Dutch) in 1983, and *Dr A.Q. Khan on science and education* in 1997.

Courtesy Dawn



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