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Art of possible turned into war of attrition

By M. Ziauddin

The performance of our political parties has remained too far from the ideal since Independence. The ruling political parties have tended to behave like elected dictatorships treating the opposition as criminals and on occasions maligning them as traitors. On the other hand the opposition has tended to challenge the very legitimacy of the ruling parties accusing them of stealing the elections. In Parliament they have tended to filibuster and outside they have resorted to attritional agitation invariably bringing governance to a standstill.

The seemingly mortal political combat that had ensued between the government and the Opposition over the Electronic Voting Machines (EVM) and i-voting for overseas Pakistanis had forced the former to focus more on criminalizing the opposition rather than on governance. And the opposition has been maligning what it called the 'selected' of being incompetent to govern.

Despite political fragmentation, political parties had developed a consensus on electoral reforms in 2017 after three years of rigorous consultations under the aegis of a multi-party parliamentary committee. And the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in Dec 2018 had submitted its reports on pilot tests on I-voting in 35 constituencies and its report on biometric verification machines tested in NA-120.

It is, indeed, unfortunate that neither of the two houses of Parliament took up these reports for discussion in the last 33 months to give directives in this regard to the ECP.

Although the Elections (Amendment) Bill, 2020 proposes major changes in the process of delimitation, voter registration, priority-listing of women candidates for reserved seats and political party regulations, the public discourse has only focused on the introduction of electronic voting machines (EVMs) and overseas voting proposed by Elections (Second Amendment) Bill, 2021.

The proposed amendment is also unclear on whether ECP can procure

technology/machines that includes built-in facility of voter authentication and verification as provided for in 84(2) of the Elections Act, 2021. Such technology/machines can compromise the voter secrecy and a voter's choice may be tracked.

Similarly, the proposed amendment requiring the ECP to enable overseas Pakistanis to exercise their right to vote in their country of residence is also strewn with inadequacies. It has not provided any corresponding changes to the election law that may be required to enable potentially 9.5 million overseas Pakistanis to vote.

The amendment does not respond to critical questions such as the responsibility of determination of qualification for overseas voters, particularly Pakistani workers abroad, as provided under Section 94(2) of the Elections Act, 2017; responsibility of their registration as voters and allocation to the constituency i.e. their choice or permanent address on National Identity Card for Overseas Pakistanis (NICOP); mechanism for ECP to enforce the legal requirement as provided for under Sections 30 (claims and objections) and Sections 37 (verification); mechanism for provisions of electoral rolls to candidates as provided under Section 41 (2), which only contains the addresses of voters where their vote is registered, but in this case the voters will not be residing on those addresses; provisions pertaining to campaigning and expense limits by candidates when they will have to campaign overseas; verification and authentication of voters on the election day as required under Section 84 (1); timing of counting of overseas votes whether during preparation of provisional results or during consolidation proceedings; voting time for overseas Pakistanis living in different time zones especially if it involved early/advance voting; treatment of list of overseas voters – one list at the constituency level or marked off at the level of electoral rolls provided at the polling stations just as in case of postal ballots issued; and candidates' oversight over voting by Pakistanis living abroad.



Any effort to amend the Elections Act, 2017 without a larger political consensus would bring into question the legitimacy of future elections, and may cause political instability that can potentially reverse the process of democratic consolidation in Pakistan.

But for the past few months, the ugly war of words between the government and the opposition had turned into a nasty feud. What was beyond doubt, however, was that extreme polarisation over such an important issue as electoral reforms would weaken the already too fragile foundations of democracy in the country.

What was most unfortunate was that the government had tended to make the ECP controversial as sitting ministers launched blistering attacks on it in the wake of the ECP listing 37 objections to the use of EVMs in the next election. Railways Minister Azam Swati accused its members of taking bribes to rig polls while Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry alleged that the chief election commissioner — whose name was among the government's suggested nominees to the post — was "a mouthpiece for the opposition". The ECP rejected the allegations as baseless and issued notices to the ministers to produce evidence to back their claims.

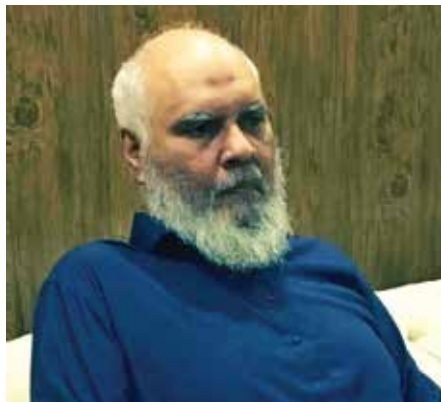
The good news is parliamentary panel has been formed to work on the issue.

The ECP's feedback would be integral to the discussion; it must have confidence it can conduct free and fair polls under the amendments proposed to the elections law. The objective must be to arrive at comprehensive and far-reaching reform. In any event, decisions must be taken with consensus.

All the political parties in an election must have trust in the process under which it is being held. Otherwise, we will simply have more elections that are contested, with the fallout poisoning the political arena. A working relationship between the government and opposition is essential to legislative work and governance.

CITY NOTES: Staying away from Pakistan

By M.A. Niazi



I'm surprised at England's decision not to come to Pakistan. It was only to be expected after New Zealand decided to abandon its tour, but nobody seems willing to own the ECB decision. British PM Boris Johnson said his government had not issued a threat warning, and the British High Commissioner to Islamabad, Christian Turner, said it wasn't him either. Even the Players' Association, said it hadn't been asked (even though the ECB said that it had been consulted).

I wouldn't be surprised if the ECB turned around and said that it hadn't cancelled the tour after all. But then, the ECB's security consulting firm is the same as Cricket New Zealand uses. They are carefully keeping quiet, and are probably saying that since New Zealand oiled out, England should do the same.

Just wait though. Australia will have to decide too. That's when Fawad Chaudhry will probably be proved true. His reaction

to the English decision was that it was the price of saying, "No more." Imran Khan said it, when the USA wanted us to do more, it seems, and we didn't.

The information of the terrorist threat is supposed to have come from a New Zealander's wife, who got an email from someone who said he was planning to attack her husband.

Of course, the mail came too late to be included in the dossier that is doing the rounds of world capitals, but then our agencies got proof that the mail had actually been sent from Mumbai.

Then there's the report that says that the person supposed to have sent the mail was actually some musician and Tiktokker. Mmmm... Sounds as if Arnab Goswami, the veteran telejournalist who got caught with his pants down, is getting his revenge. Remember, he's the guy who said that there were Pakistani Army officers on the fifth floor of the Serena in Kabul. Only the Serena there doesn't have a fifth floor. He was obviously told so by highly reliable sources. Well, those highly unreliable sources fooled our own highly unreliable sources with a Tiktokker.

Of course, someone might remind Fawad Chaudhry that when one refuses to 'do more', then cricket tours aren't cancelled; people are made horrible examples of. Like Bhutto. Or Indira Gandhi. Or Zia. Or Ziaur Rehman of Bangladesh. The last is interesting. The USA didn't really have a motive,

but India did: he wasn't doing more. But no tours were cancelled. Bangladesh wasn't even denied Test status. So maybe those highly unreliable sources helped along the coup that saw him killed. It took some doing, but the highly unreliable sources got a friendly government installed in Dhaka. It didn't help, as the Bangladeshi government has got problems with the Indian government on a number of issues, starting with the Rojinyas.

Our highly unreliable sources have got a friendly government installed in Kabul, but they are beginning to have issues. The moral is that certain problems go with borders, and no matter how friendly the government, it can't help behaving like a government.

Meanwhile, Imran has advised the players to take out their anger at New Zealand on the cricket field. That sounds like a formula for getting dropped. How often have we heard of someone dismissed because of a 'rush of blood'? Of course, he's being optimistic to assume that they will be playing. Well, they probably won't be playing at home.

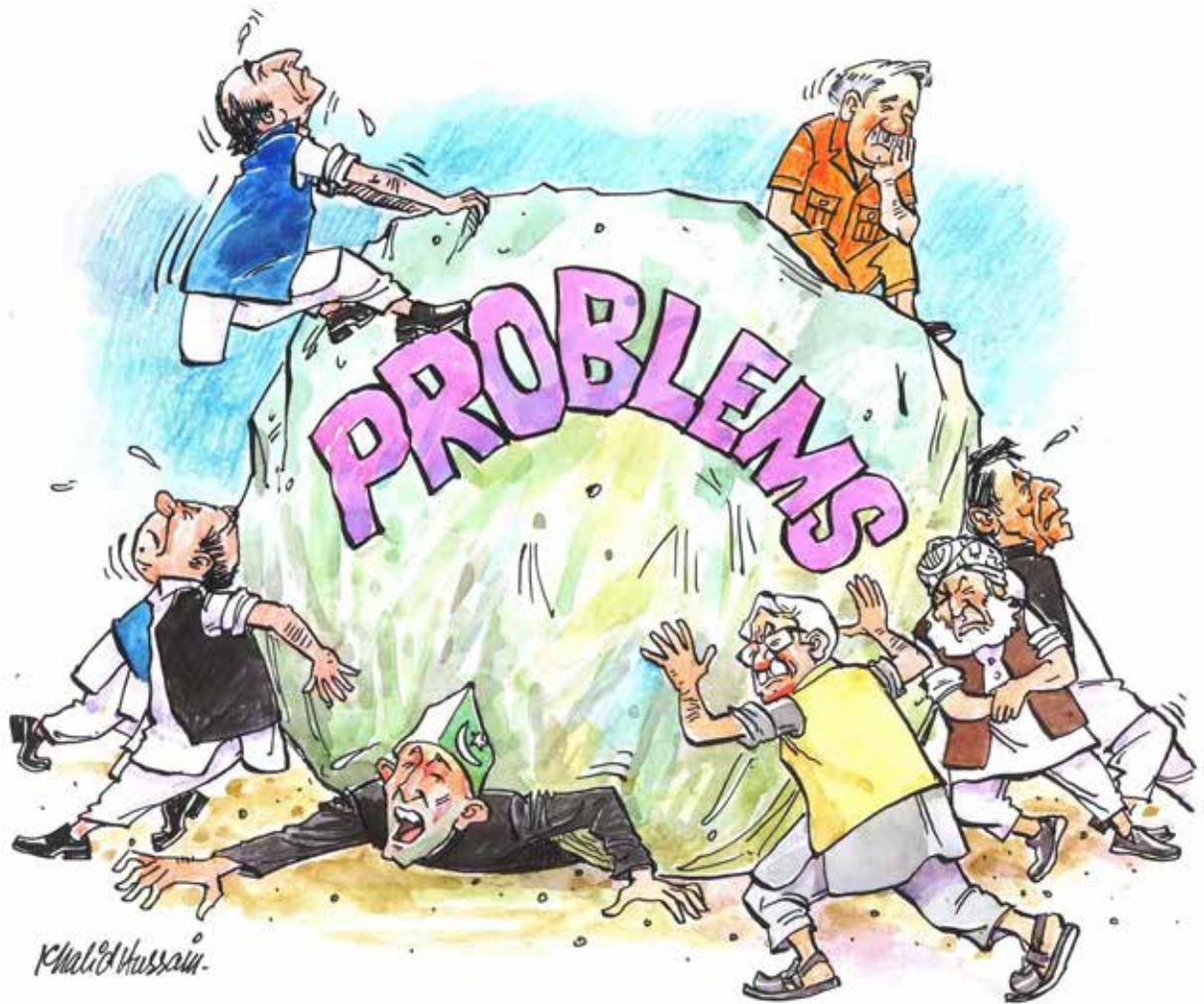
And while New Zealand got a threat and pulled out, who threatened England? The same Tiktokker or a different one? Frankly, I suspect Boris Johnson. Just look at him. Doesn't he have the face of a natural-born prankster? I realize we as a country have lost the right since 2018 (and some would say 1990) to point fingers at other country's Prime Ministers, but still...

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Save Us, O Constitution!



By Hammad Ghaznavi

TTrue, apolitical actors have never let go a chance to distort, deface and debase democratic dispensation in the country but can we altogether absolve politicians of the responsibility of a teetering political system? Despite long stints of dictatorships, whenever our politicians got a chance or a half-chance, did they judiciously use the opportunity to strengthen the political system? Or they proved short-sighted collaborators, devoted to self-aggrandizement and selfish, petty gains?

Let's go to the genesis of it all. The party leading the freedom movement of India, Indian National Congress had a long history of political struggle. It had among its ranks seasoned politicians, imbued with the spirit of nationalism, resisting the colonial power and suffering for their defiance of the Raj. The Congress party existed at the grassroots level and its leaders hailed from various walks of life, including urban middle classes. On the other hand, All India Muslim League was a much younger party, and its leadership was largely restricted to the upper classes, nawabs and sardars. It was around 1940 that the League turned towards peoples' politics, while the 1946 elections were perhaps the first serious sign of its popularity among the Muslim masses. Interestingly, most of the senior leadership of the League came from the Uttar

Pardesh or other Indian states that were not going to form a part of the new Muslim state. In a word, the League politicians were less rooted, and less experienced at the statecraft.

Little wonder then that Pakistan could not have its first constitution for about nine years while India had its first constitution ratified by its constituent assembly in 1949. Ironically, Pakistan's constitution was abrogated in 1958, within about 2 and a half years, by the first tinpot dictator General Ayub Khan. Likewise, India had its first general elections in 1951, while Pakistan had to wait for about 23 years after its inception for its first general elections.

Obviously, Martial Laws are primarily responsible for the weakening of the political system in the country, and from the word go Ayub Khan was taking interest in politics, which earned him scolding and punishment (of unfavourable posting to East Pakistan) from Jinnah himself. Another General, Akbar Khan, allegedly planned an attempted coup in 1951 against the Liaquat Ali Khan government, known as the Rawalpindi Conspiracy Case. Apolitical elements have been trying to assume a political role, to capture more and more resources of the land, right from the inception of the



country. But even in the first couple of years of the governance, there were no great examples set by the politicians in-charge.

Federation is a rather delicate political arrangement that requires justice, rule of law, equality among the federating units, and, at times, magnanimity on the part of the big brother. These principles, unfortunately, were flouted straightaway. For instance, the principle applied to all the provincial governments in 1947 was denied to the then NWFP government of Dr Khan sahib, which was dissolved within a week of Independence. Bengalis were denied their language, as Urdu was declared as the sole national language. Against the wishes of Sindhi Nationalists, after partition Karachi became the federal capital, and the provincial capital was moved to Hyderabad – an administrative decision that hugely impacted the future of relations between Sindhis and non-Sindhis.



Regarding fundamental human rights, the attitude of the state, governed by politicians at that time, was unenviable. The Bhabra Massacre in 1948, the mass shooting of the Khudaikhidmatgars (Red Shirts) wherein about 150 protestors were killed, as they were demonstrating against the imprisonment of their leaders, Dr Khan Sahib and Bacha Khan. Likewise in East Pakistan, in the aftermath of the adoption of Urdu as the national language, protests started and reached the climax on 21st February 1952, when some of the protesting students of Dhaka University were shot dead by the law enforcement agencies. All the above-mentioned decisions were taken and implemented by politicians.

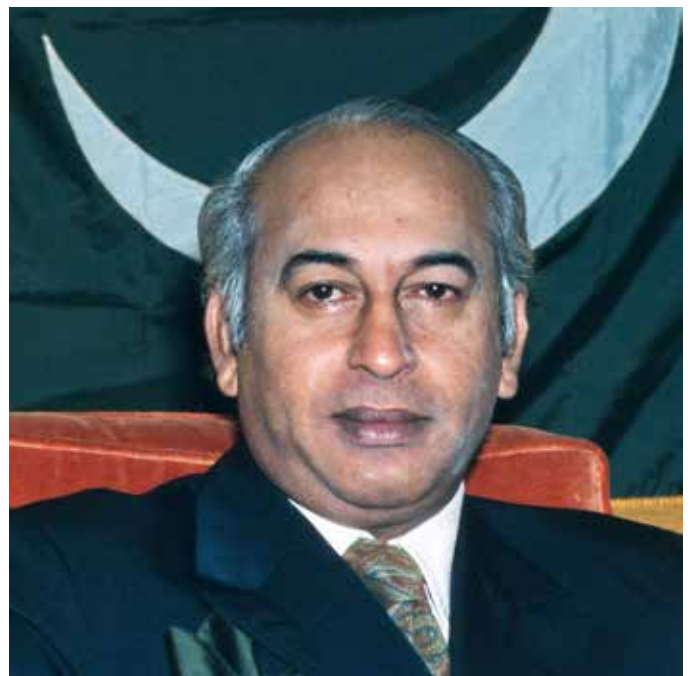
Free and fair elections, another cornerstone of democratic dispensation, have, to say the least, a chequered history in the country. Later, the martial law dictators and rogue elements in certain institutions played havoc with our electoral system, but even in the earlier years, when politicians were more in control, the precedents were wicked. The term 'Jhurloo' was

coined to describe the first election held in Punjab after partition in March 1951. It was a bad beginning. In 1954, when the first election was held in East Pakistan and the Jugtoo Front formed the government, it lasted a couple of months before its dissolution by the federal government on charges of 'treason'.

Firm, principled party affiliation is another prerequisite for strengthening political systems. Pakistani politicians failed on that count, to start with. In 1953, when prime minister Khwaja Nazimuddin was removed by Governor General Ghulam Muhammad, the next day almost the entire party had ditched him. Many League leaders didn't think twice in 1955, abandoning the League to be a part of a new political party, Republican, formed at the behest of the Governor General Iskandar Mirza and the military establishment.

In October 1958, when the government had planned to hold the first general elections in the country, the first martial law was imposed in the country – perhaps the darkest hour of the country's history. Many influential politicians, particularly from the West Pakistan, supported the dictator, Ayub Khan.

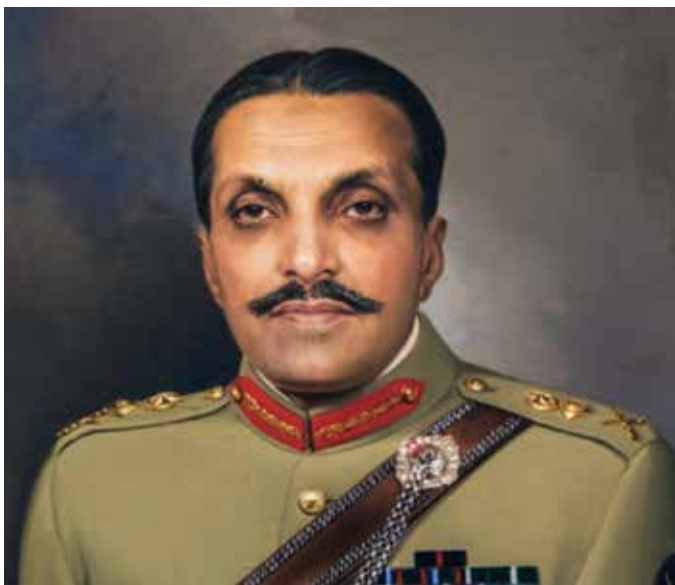
Ayub Khan brought into being a constitution in 1962, which was aptly described as a 'constitution of the president, by the president, for the president'. Ayub had to his 'credit', the first presidential election based on the system of basic democracies (local bodies) that served as an electoral college for the election. Madir-e-Millat Fatima Jinnah was defeated in that rigged presidential election, and with it died the last ray of hope, particularly for the East Pakistanis, of ever having a fair political system in the country that could ensure them equality vis a vis the West Pakistan.





No one expects the martial law dictators to bolster democratic political systems, as in strong political systems all institutions function within an ambit defined by the constitution of the land, ensuring just distribution of resources among institutions, federating units and citizens at large. But when after 13 years of dictatorial rule, the country was dismembering, the role of West Pakistani politicians was far from just and honourable. There were hardly any sane voices, protesting the March military action in East Pakistan. Even Zulfikar Ali Bhutto made the following comment on the Operation Searchlight: "Thank God, the country has been saved."

Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's rule was a mixed bag, but as for strengthening the political system, his record looked rather dismal. ZAB put his political opponents behind bars, dissolved his opponents' governments of NWFP (now KPK) and Balochistan, approved of military action in Balochistan, and finally held a controversial general election. Even his party members suffered his wrath every now and then, facing jails or physical torture. Five and a half years after the dismemberment of Pakistan, another martial law was imposed in the country. Military dictator Ziaul Haq's sins were numerous. He arranged ZAB's judicial murder, destroyed the political parties, held partyless polls, promoting parochial culture, dividing the society on the basis of cast and creed. He used the religion card to perpetuate his illegitimate rule for 11 years.



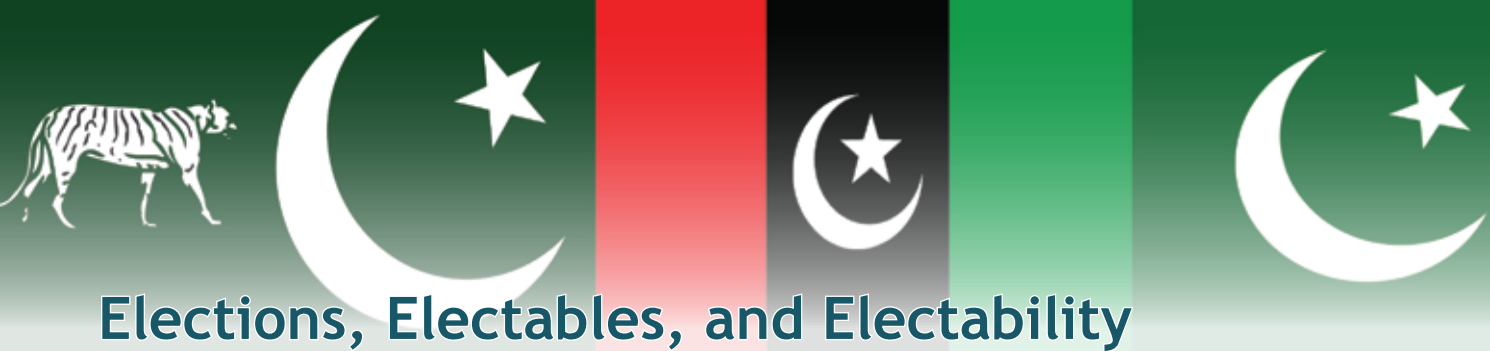
Politicians, after Zia, got another opportunity, though under the strict watch of the establishment, but it was squandered as Nawaz Sharif and Benazir Bhutto served two terms each as prime minister, collaborating with the powers that be to dislodge each other from power. They tried to decimate each other through false cases. In 1999, yet another martial law was imposed by General Pervez Musharraf. The sordid tale of undermining the political system continued unabated as

Musharraf like the previous martial law dictators weakened the political parties on purpose, and created a King's party.

Many believe that the biggest achievement of main political parties, PML-N and PPP, in the entire political history of the country was the Charter of Democracy signed by Benazir Bhutto and Nawaz Sharif that led to the 18th amendment, cleaning up the 1973 constitution of all the tinkering done with it by the martial law regimes. This agreement on the political roadmap was a humungous victory of the political forces. Later, there have been certain violations of the Charter by the two parties; however, the 18th amendment remains the high water mark of our recent political history. Meanwhile, a new political party emerged on the horizon and introduced a new, populist brand of politics wherein every politician of note outside its pale was dubbed corrupt and jailed or proceeded against. Every dissenting voice from judiciary, media or other institutions like Election Commission, is either silenced or threatened to be muzzled. The present 'hybrid' system apart, Imran Khan is a politician, and his failures of governance will be considered a failure of politicians in general. After all, he is the chief of one of the two most popular political parties of the country.



All said, political parties need to respect and strengthen Parliament against all odds. With Nawaz Sharif as PM attending 15 percent of the NA sittings and PM Imran Khan with 10 percent, have disappointed many. Political parties need to have more democracy within, ensuring fair internal elections, and more open policy debates. It is certainly time to sign a new 'contract' by all the actors of political arena, including apolitical ones, vowing to honour the constitution, as that is the only path to guarantee the strengthening of our political system.



Elections, Electables, and Electability

As the next general election nears, many electables seem ready to fly PM Khan's coop, and some parties are worried about their own electability.

By Ahmad Waleed

Through the tumultuous years of democracy in Pakistan, space for the king's party is created to cater to the political needs of the powers that be ahead of every election. Sometimes a faction comprising electables springs up within one of the major parties to join another contender to complete the required numbers in the provincial or the national assemblies.

It is thanks to this pattern that Pakistan Muslim League, the country's founding party, has splintered ad infinitum to give birth to faction after faction since the birth of Pakistan.

Small wonder then that, true to this pattern, there are whispers of a new king's party in the making three years into the term of the incumbent government. Poor performance in government of Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) is being seen as the reason behind the likely shuffle.

Many PTI parliamentarians are already in search of a platform other than PTI and PML-N to contest next elections, fearing strong chances of defeat at the hands of their rivals in the PML-N.

"We avoid our voters in our constituencies as the soaring prices of daily use items have made their lives miserable and there are no hopes of any relief in near future", a so-called electable was recently overheard saying. "The only option is to find a new party".

The Jahangir Tareen group has refused to budge despite some relief provided to the group leader and acceptance of major demands of the group members who were invited by the Chief Minister Usman Buzdar and offered special development grants in their respective constituencies.

Nevertheless, their reservations are not going away as the group remains intact in

Punjab expecting several other members of the parliament to join them before the next general elections.

Aleem Khan, a close associate of Jahangir Tareen, has also tendered his resignation citing 'personal reasons'. He is waiting for acceptance by Prime Minister Khan. "As soon as the PM accepts my resignation, I will submit a formal resignation from the ministry to the Punjab Chief Minister," he told reporters a few days ago.

Some close friends of a frustrated Aleem Khan have revealed he has decided to quit politics after sheer disappointment over the treatment he has faced at the hands of the senior leadership. They say his entire focus will be on his business, which has suffered badly during all this time. There are also rumours he has purchased one of the top news channels of the country to enter the club of influential lot of the country.

Meanwhile, in an interview, Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Pervez Elahi ruled out the possibility of an alliance with the PTI in the next general elections. He told the host that they will make the decision in accordance with the political situation of the country.

Although they are the key allies of the PTI at the federal and provincial levels, the Chaudhrys of Gujrat have sporadically resorted to criticising the policies of the PTI government, especially on the price-hike, in a bid to maintain their separate identity on critical issues. Hence, they have a bright chance of becoming part of the future alignment of the political setup.

On the other hand, Pakistan Muslim League (N) continues to face the dilemma of appeasement and hostile narratives. Recently, PML-N MNA Mian Javed Latif from Sheikhupura was issued a show-cause notice for launching a series of attacks on

some elements within the party who he said were trying to appease the establishment and sabotage the narrative of the party supremo Nawaz Sharif.

"Some leaders are on assignment from certain forces to play the role of a spoiler," he remarked, without naming anybody in an interview with a local TV channel. It was widely believed that his indirect reference was to Khawaja Muhammad Asif and Shahbaz Sharif.

It was learnt that Shahbaz Sharif was extremely annoyed by the statement of Javed Latif. The younger Sharif was able to convince his elder brother Nawaz Sharif to seek an explanation from Javed Latif as to why he violated the 'ethics and discipline' of the party.

The bombshell hit the party's efforts aimed at mending fences with the powers that be at the behest of some senior party members who have had enough of anti-establishment narrative and now desire the party to soften its stance.

It is widely believed that no party at odds with the establishment can rise to power, which is why an influential faction of PML-N leaders is eager to ensure the party becomes acceptable to the powers that be well ahead of the next general elections.

However, the issuance of the show-cause notice to Javed Latif has further exposed the infighting in the party ranks.

Pakistan People's Party has already fallen for the bait. All the main parties and groups in the opposition are trying their best to be among the favourites of the establishment.

It seems the PTI has smelled the moods of realignments taking place in the political arena of the country. It will definitely launch a quest for its survival in the months and weeks ahead.



Interpreting the Results of the Showdown in Garrisons

There are strong reasons why the cantonment boards' elections left the winner miffed and the loser jubilant.



By Khalid Wasim

Despite securing the most seats at the national level in the recent cantonment boards' elections, Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) is smarting. The reason is obvious. It was soundly trounced by arch-rival Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) in the 18 cantonment boards of Pakistan's most populous Punjab province.

On the other hand, the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), which remained runners up in the polls overall, is jubilant and upbeat as it has managed to maintain its electoral supremacy in its stronghold Punjab despite being on the opposition benches in the provincial assembly.

Over 1,500 candidates contested the party-based elections in 206 general seats of the country's 39 cantonment boards on 12 September 2021, the first large-scale electoral contest at the grassroots level between the arch-rivals since the 2018 general elections. All the country's major political parties had

fielded their candidate, but participated without forming any alliance.

Upset over the unexpected development, Prime Minister Imran Khan while presiding over an emergency meeting of the party's senior leaders two days after the polls in the garrisons reportedly expressed his annoyance over the party's defeat in the Punjab, especially in three major stations – Rawalpindi, Lahore and Multan.

Besides, the cricketer-turned-politician also showed his displeasure over losing the polls in Peshawar, though the party had swept the polls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where it had been ruling for past more than eight years.

According to Federal Minister for Information and Broadcasting Fawad Chaudhry, who was present in the meeting, Imran Khan expressed "satisfaction" on overall victory of the PTI, but he tasked party's chief organiser Saifullah Niazi and secretary general Amir Mehmood Kiani to

analyse the results in the Punjab province.

On the other hand, PML-N leadership seems to be satisfied with the party's overall performance, though the party showed dismal performance in other parts of the country and it had not fielded even a single candidate in Balochistan.

However, there are reports that party's supreme leader Nawaz Sharif is unhappy over the party's performance in Gujranwala division and he has already ordered a probe into the matter.

His daughter and party's vice-president Maryam Nawaz through her social media account on Twitter termed the party's victory "unprecedented" because, according to her, it has come at a time when the party is facing worst persecution and political victimisation at the hands of the PTI-led coalition government.

With party workers led by Khawaja Saad Rafique were celebrating the victory in



Lahore, Maryam Nawaz tweeted: “Unprecedented that despite being the prime target & enemy no 1, PMLN doing exceedingly well Masha’Allah. Better than all including PTI that never contests on its electoral strength & relies solely on scrounged support. Future is PMLN Insha’Allah!”

PML-N President and Opposition Leader in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif reportedly stated that the party’s victory in the cantonment board elections “meant the end of PTI’s politics.”

Addressing a convention of the party activists in Sialkot, Mr Sharif was carried away by his emotions when he said the majority of the Punjab had voted for his party, although the total number of registered voters in all the 42 cantonment boards of the country is only 2.1 million.

“The PTI died at its birthplace”, Mr Sharif said while indirectly hitting out at the ruling party as the opposition always alleges that the PTI has acquired power through the backing of the military establishment.

The results of these elections surprised many seasoned political analysts as well who had been predicting the PTI’s victory in the Punjab for being the ruling party. Pakistan has a long tradition of the ruling party winning local government elections including cantt board polls.

The notion got further validation from the results of the elections of the legislative bodies in Gilgit-Baltistan and Azad Kashmir held in February and July, respectively, and held true in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa in the cantt board elections.

Some analysts believe that the “establishment” under a planned strategy provided an open field to the parties to assess their electoral strength in this the last major electoral exercise before the next general elections.

Surprisingly, no party cried foul in the elections and even the losers have accepted the defeat and the results with an open heart. Shahbaz Sharif declared that “there is no denying the fact that the cantonment board elections took place without any interference” and he also expressed the hope that the next general elections would also be held in a similar transparent manner.

The complete results of the cantonment boards’ elections show that the PTI and the PML-N remained victorious in nearly 58 per cent wards of 39 cantonments where polling was held. The PTI is at the top of the list with 63 seats, followed by the PML-N with 59 seats.

The independents have won 51 seats, 12 more than the combined winning seats of five other political parties, including the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) which won 17 general seats – 14 in Sindh and three in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The Jamaat-i-Islami managed to bag seven seats – two in Punjab and five in Sindh. The PTI is the only party which secured victories in all the four provinces.

The Muttahida Qaumi Movement bagged 10 seats (all in Sindh), the Balochistan Awami Party won three seats (all in Balochistan), and the Awami National Party (ANP) remained victorious in two wards of KP.

The religious parties once again failed to make any impact as, except the JI getting some seats, the other religious parties, including the Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam (JUI-F) and the banned Tehreek Labbaik Pakistan (TLP), failed to win even a single seat despite fielding candidates in a good number.

The three religious parties – JI, JUI-F and TLP – had fielded a total of 212 candidates in as many wards, but only seven candidates, out of 105 fielded by the JI, remained victorious. Thus, the victory rate of the three religious parties remained only a little over three per cent.

The TLP, which was banned by the government under the Anti-Terrorism Act some five months back, had surprised many by fielding 84 candidates in 17 cantonments in three provinces.

The ultra-right-wing TLP has fielded largest number of 57 candidates in nine cantonments of the Punjab, followed by 24 in six cantonments of Sindh and three candidates in two cantonments of KP.

According to Fawad Chaudhry, the TLP contested the elections because the Punjab government had not yet moved the case to the Supreme Court for delisting of the TLP as a political party as required under the law.

The government had slapped the ban on the TLP under the Anti-Terrorism Act on 15 April after three days of countrywide violent protests by its activists after the arrest of their leader Saad Rizvi in Lahore.

The protest call had been given by the TLP leadership over what it claimed government’s failure to implement an agreement with the party, which had demanded that the matter of French ambassador’s expulsion from Pakistan over the blasphemy issue be referred to the parliament.

Some two weeks prior to the polls, a PTI letter to the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) asking it to deploy troops inside and outside the polling stations generated a controversy. The PPP while opposing the PTI’s request for the army deployment said the experience of 2018 general elections was “one time too many”.

Similarly, the PML-N while objecting to the move said the government wanted to make the elections controversial. Later, the ECP rejected the PTI’s request and conducted the elections by deploying Rangers and FC personnel outside the polling stations.

The cantonment board elections were the fifth major electoral exercise the nation witnessed this year amid Coronavirus pandemic. In February, by-elections were held on seven national and provincial assembly seats. The same month elections in Gilgit-Baltistan were conducted, followed by the Senate polls in March though they were not direct elections, whereas people of Azad Kashmir elected their representatives in July.

The electronic and print media gave extensive coverage to the elections which in the past had never got such public attention. The Free and Fair Election Network (FAFEN) also observed the cantt board elections for the first time.

There are 219 wards in 42 cantonment boards all over the country, but no polling was held in any of the nine wards of Kamra, Cherat and Murree Gallies cantonments where either the candidates have been elected unopposed or polling has been postponed. In Kamra, all the candidates boycotted the elections in protest against the delimitation of their wards.



Who is Afraid of Local Bodies' Polls?

Whether or not the PTI and PPP like it, the constitutionally mandated local government elections are coming sooner rather than later.

By Naveed Miraj

Our governments whether in the center or provinces always appear reluctant to hold local bodies' elections for reasons of control. A different party surfacing winner in local bodies means sharing administrative and financial powers – something no government is prepared to do.

The last local government elections were held in the country at the intervention of Supreme Court of Pakistan. However, unfortunately, in parts of the country, the elected local governments were sent packing by the respective governments before completing their stipulated term, whilst in other parts, they remained non-functional.

Whilst the cantonment board elections have recently been conducted, the federal and provincial governments are dragging their feet on the local government elections in their respective territories on one pretext or another.

In Balochistan, the local bodies completed their term way back in January 2019. Whilst almost one year has passed since the expiration of term of local bodies both in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh provinces. In the federal capital, the term of local bodies completed in February this year.

Under Article 140(A) and Section (4) 219 of the Election Act 2017, the election commission is bound to hold the elections within 120 days. Hence, the not conducting the elections within the given timeframe is a clear violation of the Constitution.

The Sindh government during meetings with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) is expressing its reservations on the 2017 census results. Appearing before the Election Commission of Pakistan recently, Karachi Administrator Murtaza Wahab once again reiterated the PPP's position

that the population of both Sindh and Balochistan was understated in the census.

Using this as a pretext, Sindh has so far withheld from the ECP the details of the number of union councils, maps, and other data. Now this information is a prerequisite for the conduct of local government elections, without which the process of delimitation of constituencies cannot commence.

The Balochistan government is also not cooperating with the ECP to go ahead with the demarcation of constituencies.

Contrary to the tall claims by Prime Minister Imran Khan to bring revolutionary local government system in Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, one does not see the local bodies' elections taking place in the near future. In particular, the local bodies' elections in Punjab are surrounded by sheer uncertainty.

The provincial government had dissolved the local bodies' structure after enacting the Punjab Local Government Act 2019. The old local bodies' representatives approached the Supreme Court and the apex court eventually restored the local bodies, declaring their dissolution unconstitutional.

The Punjab government went into the review appeal, stating that it would be very difficult to restore the old local government institutions as the process involved massive administrative and financial complexities.

The apex court's is yet to decide on the review petition whilst the term of local bodies in Punjab is ending on 31 December 2021.

As for Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where the process of delimitation has been completed,

a local government bill is gathering dust in the provincial assembly as regardless of presenting it on the agenda of the assembly, it is not being taken up for approval. The bill provides for holding the LG polls in two phases. The provincial government wants to hold the polls in the merged tribal districts separately.

After the cantonment elections, these local government elections will be a major test of popularity of the political parties amongst the masses – a test the PTI and the PPP would rather sit out given their performance.

The people at large in Karachi are not happy with the performance of PPP government, as little has been done to address their chronic issues relating to water, sanitation and sewerage.

Similarly, the PTI is faced with the issue of price hike of essential commodities, which has badly dented its popularity. The same was visible in the results of recently held Punjab cantonment board elections where the PML (N) trounced the ruling party.

According to the political pundits, the two parties do not want to face embarrassment at a time with two years left in the next general elections.

However, given the fact that the ECP is seized with the matter, one may expect early LG polls or at least a cutoff date for the conduct of the polls whether the provincial governments like it or not.

Reserving judgment earlier this month on a case about local bodies' elections in Sindh, a three-member bench of the ECP headed by Chief Election Commissioner Sikandar Sultan Raja had made it clear that it is ruling will apply to all provinces.



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PMDA Put in the Deep Freeze?

The government's proposal to set up a unified authority to regulate all forms of media attracted flak from all sides.



By Sarfraz Raja

Legislation is no doubt an evolutionary process. As the time passes and as new technologies emerge, many laws become irrelevant. In Pakistan, most of the media laws are of pre-digital age. Right now, there are different laws and institutions to regulate print media, electronic media, film industry and some of social media.

The Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority (PEMRA) looks after affairs of electronic elections media while the Press Council is specific to the print media. Prevention of Electronic Crimes Act (PECA) and Pakistan Telecommunication Authority (PTA) is meant for matters relating to cyber stuff and Film Censor Board is to oversee the film industry.

Unifying all these relevant laws and putting all these platforms under one umbrella is not a bad idea ever but execution is always sensitive and to attain unanimity is a bigger challenge.

In recent past social media has become more influential mainly due to its accessibility. However, there are very few laws to regulate this segment of mass media and fake news as it has become challenging for countries like USA too.

A few weeks ago, when some draft points of proposed Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA) surfaced, a storm of criticism from the media industry ensued. Journalist unions and media owners' organizations started screaming and protesting on TV screens and roads, while all major opposition parties stood by with them rejecting proposed media development authority.

Meanwhile, the government shared the proposed plan and the PMDA framework in a subcommittee meeting of National Assembly Standing Committee for Information and Broadcasting.

Merger of all relevant organizations

The major objective of PMDA is described as converging Pakistan electronic media regulatory authority PEMRA, Press Council of Pakistan (PCP), Central Board of Film Censors (CBFC), Press Registrar Office, Audit Bureau of Circulation (ABC), Implementation Tribunal for Newspapers Employees (ITNE) into a single regulatory body, called Pakistan Media Development Authority (PMDA), the new body is intended to regulate electronic, print, and digital media as well as films.

Composition of the authority

As proposed, the PMDA will be composed of twelve members including six private members with expertise related to media, law, films, cyber security, engineering, and social services.

Powers of the authority

The authority will have exclusive rights to issue licenses, registration certificates and NOCs for print, electronic, and digital media and films.

Complaints commissions

Under the proposed PMDA, there will be a media complaints commission consisting of chairperson and five members being citizen of eminence from the general public, at least two of whom must be women.

The commission will also receive complaints from journalists and media workers associated with print electronic and digital media regarding nonpayment of wages and for the enforcement of contract. All complaints will be decided within 21 days.



On any violation of the Act, the complaints commission can recommend fine or suspension of license, registration or NOC and can also recommend fine against frivolous complaints.

Media tribunals

A media tribunal is to be set up to hear appeals against the decisions of the media complaints commission. The next higher forum for appeals will be the Supreme Court of Pakistan.

Media tribunal shall consist of ten members including a chairperson who has been or is, qualified to be a judge of high court. The tribunal would have to decide appeals within 30 days.

Offices of the Media Complaint Commission would be established in Islamabad, Lahore, Karachi, Multan, Quetta, Peshawar, and Sukkur.

Consultation with stakeholders

The government has assured parliamentary committee that no draft of Media Development Authority has been prepared as yet. These documents shared are just proposals and consultation has already been done with media house owners and journalist

associations including Pakistan Broadcaster's Association (PBA) Council of Pakistan Newspapers Editors (CPNE), major press clubs and Pakistan, and Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ).

Government also assured the parliamentary committee that there is no proposal of licensing digital media but these platforms would be registered as to bring them under the tax net.

Objections and reservations

Media owners' organisations has completely rejected this authority bill while some of journalists' organizations have partially agreed upon this new legislation with reservation on some of points like penalties.

Previously available proposals show some huge penalties against fake news with PKR 100 million at individual level and 250 million at organizational level, which was actually a major point of concern for journalists specifically due to individually suggested huge penalty but the in draft framework shared with the parliamentary committee the maximum penalty amount mentioned is PKR 225 million.

A major reservation is about neutrality and independence of the authority. Being a

body under federal government, it would be open to influence from the government, which seem quite a genuine concern.

Another objection is that the proposed law actually bypasses authority of high courts and seeks to establish tribunals parallel to them. The government's take is that previously PEMRA remained unable to implement its decisions just because all of them were challenged in high courts and stay orders were granted immediately against those decisions.

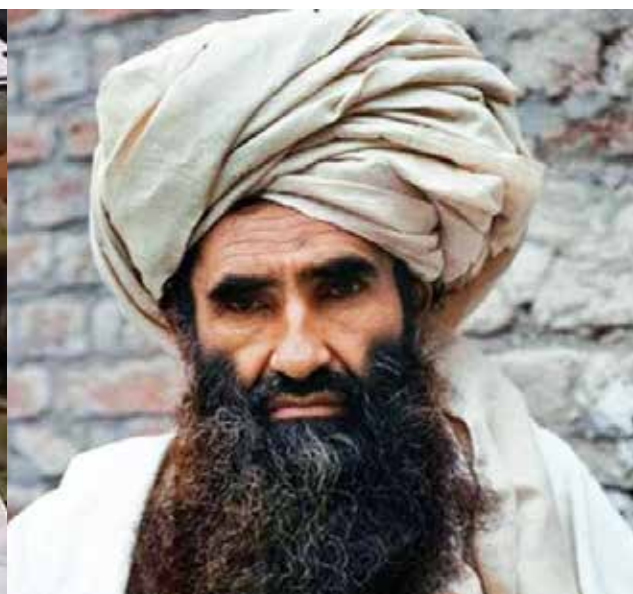
Initially it seemed that government is in hurry and wants to implement this new legislation as early as possible, by issuance of presidential ordinance if need be. But after strong and united reaction from media houses, journalists and political parties, the government has stepped back.

After a two-day sit-in in front of parliament house during the annual presidential address to a joint sitting of Senate and National Assembly, Minister of Information Broadcasting in a meeting with PBA, CPNE and journalist representatives committed not to move on in hurry and to establish a joint committee of these stakeholders to draft proposals after consultation. Now it seems that for time being this Media Development Authority may be put on the back burner.



Stuck with the Haqqanis

Internal wrangling over the shape of new Afghanistan grips the Taliban.



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

Afghanistan's powerful Haqqani network appears to be heading up a hard-core Taliban faction dead set against the formation of an inclusive government in the country, The Truth International (TTI) can report based on background discussions.

Taliban sources from Kabul say discussions over the question devolved into a heated exchange between Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and the Haqqanis at the Presidential Palace in Kabul also known as Arg.

Baradar believed that the Afghan Taliban would have to address the concerns of the international community, but the Haqqani network, which disagreed with him, believed that the Taliban had won the war, so the outside world had no right to make suggestions or demands.

Apparently Baradar – a leading luminary of the Taliban-US talks at Doha, Qatar – believes the Taliban have a responsibility to honour the explicit and implicit covenants the Qatar-based envoys made with the world during the long drawn out talks.

Following the heated exchange at Arg, Baradar seems to have made himself scarce for a few days, sending the rumour mill in overdrive.

Mullah Baradar must find himself in the middle of a catch 22. The leaders of the international community, including the United States, China, and Russia, who he spoke to, obviously must have relied on his promises to support the Taliban.

There is no doubt that the Taliban leadership at Kandahar has great respect for Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, but on the other hand, the Haqqani group led by Khalil Haqqani also wields enormous influence with the Taliban.

From ordinary fighters to commanders, the Taliban agree with the idea that the system and the people against whom they fought for twenty years, including many against whom they fought even before the arrival of the United States, cannot participate in their government.

The majority of the Taliban look at the idea of an inclusive government as a betrayal of the Taliban blood. They support Khalil Haqqani on this count.

Baradar's visit to Kandahar was also a link in the chain of lobbying for himself in the birthplace of the Taliban. He was there to softly register his protest against this only Taliban-centric system and to convince members of the central shura to get their support.

But while recording a video message against the rumours that had been killed by Haqqani during the heated debate, his lips and body language confirmed the gossip that the matter was temporarily suppressed but everything was still not right for him.

These political differences are also affecting the capital Kabul. If the ministers are old, then obviously the expectations will be the old ones. So this time both the bottle and the wine are old.

Abdul Ghani Baradar also expressed these concerns at the presidential palace. The expansion of interim cabinet with the inclusion of recent names is a manifestation of these facts. There are some names, which were excluded from the list previously, and Iran was unhappy with that.

Recently, people protested against removal of Governor Haji Usman Turabi in the Kunar province. The Governor resisted his removal. Now the former Taliban leaders are back in the driving seat expecting the same old days of power, and are now wondering what to do and how to do it.

The same confusion is in their policy towards women's rights. They have instructed working women to stay at

home. Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid promised them to pay them salaries until a policy is drawn and the final decision taken regarding their work.

“We are in the process of policymaking for Afghan women. We will invite religious scholars and other stakeholders to tell us what is the right way and environment where a woman can work under Sharia. After a proper policy we will be able to tell the world that it is not decided by the government but by the people.” Zabihullah said in his latest TV interview.

It seems that the government is aware of the pressure from international community but there is an inside pressure from the hard-core Taliban circles who are not ready to embrace people they fought against. They do not have policies, they have beliefs. To them women were victims of the western cultural invasion. So they are not easily accepting the change and it will take time if there is anything about women rights.

In the 1990s, they ruled a war-ravaged Afghanistan without any infrastructure, and only peace was expected from them. But now that they have reached the offices, there is ample infrastructure. There are institutions they have to head to now. Policies exist and of course, they have to be changed, so how to change them is a question haunting them in the middle of their nights.

Based on discussions with close associates of several ministers, it seems they were not ready, and now some of them are thinking of changing their portfolios.

Sources close to the ministers also reveal they have lists of the officials who worked at respective ministries before the Taliban's return. The problem now is that it is not known whether those officials are currently in Afghanistan or have left.

If they are in the country the next troubling question popping up in their minds is where to contact them. Sources said that some important officials were also found but they were so scared that they turned down the Taliban's offers citing personal reasons.

A bureaucrat cannot run an office by force. The Taliban's inability to come with qualified staff was probably why top

Pakistani official signalled Islamabad's willingness to send people from Pakistan to help out the Taliban. But many leaders of the Kandahar group opposed it at home.

Life is on a go-slow with uncertainty in the air in different cities including Kabul, Jalalabad, Mazar-e-Sharif, and Kandahar. The majority of citizens are considering leaving the country, and are confined to their homes.

Women in Kabul go out once a week to ask what the Taliban have decided about their future and when they will return to work, as the Afghan Taliban have told the world. One of the major challenge is how to put the financial system back on track.



Banks are not working properly while the world has frozen Afghan accounts and disconnected the country from the global financial system. The Taliban and the citizenry alike are upset over this, wishing the assets would be unfrozen, because the dysfunctional financial system is causing untold human suffering.

International donors pledged more than USD 1.1 billion at a conference on Afghanistan the other week to address those concerns but the Taliban have also called for an estimated USD 10 billion in Afghan central bank assets held in foreign countries to be released so that they can be used to address these issues.

Trapped between the old ideology and their new understanding with the outside world, the Taliban government is worried about how to kick-start the affairs of the new state.

The real problem is that there are three distinct cadres of Taliban. There are the old-guard Taliban who were part of the original Taliban movement after the Russian withdrawal; there are those who joined them when they took over Afghanistan the first time and fought for a losing cause after the United States attack in the wake of 9/11; and then there those born and raised in those 20 years since 9/11.

There are marked differences in the temperaments and leanings of these three cadres of the Taliban. These differences are now slowing down governance and the speed of delivery.

Meanwhile, Abu Obaidullah Mutawakil, an alleged recruiter and key leader of ISKP (Islamic State in Khorasan Province) and a professor at Kabul University, has allegedly been assassinated by the Taliban. Although the Taliban strongly deny their involvement, other ISKP members were also gunned down in several other places around the time Mutawakil's murder surfaced.

The Taliban government is now planning an operation against ISKP in the Nangarhar province. As a result, there is a risk of a strong reaction from ISKP. Recently, ISKP has bombed a Taliban vehicle in Jalalabad. So far they have claimed seven attacks since the Taliban came into power.

Amid this a situation, there is a difference of opinion in the current Afghan setup on whether to keep the Pakistani Taliban or expel them. The Kandahar group believes that the Taliban have a responsibility not to let anyone use the Afghan soil against any country. If the Pakistani Taliban have safe harbour in Afghanistan and they attack Pakistan, it will be a breach of that promise.

On its part, the TTP has already stepped up attacks in Pakistan, as has the ISKP.

On the other hand, the Haqqani network believes that the issue should be resolved through understanding and that the Pakistani Taliban should not be put under pressure. The Haqqanis fear the Pakistani Taliban could join ISKP if pressed too hard. Although there are many major issues for the Taliban on the external front like the issue of acceptance on the world stage, the internal ones are even bigger.

The Disaster that is Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan

A colossal humanitarian crisis is brewing in Afghanistan with millions of lives at risk as Taliban struggle to restore order in Afghanistan

By Haq Nawaz Khan

It took them just six weeks to race to Kabul, completing their occupation of Afghanistan. But six more weeks down the line, the Taliban are yet to come up with a comprehensive plan to take the country out of the economic and political turmoil their rise to power has triggered.

A new normal is slowly settling in the war-ravaged country, but the great majority of the Afghan citizenry are passing through the hardest time of their lives despite the relative peace after decades of active hostilities.

Winning the people's confidence is turning out to be a serious challenge for the new government, apparently at a loss as to how it can win their hearts and minds and allay their fears about future.

The Taliban have established their writ across the country militarily, but a political dispensation acceptable to all is nowhere in sight. The Taliban government is in the process of filling the vacant posts, and under fire for not appointing professional officials.

The new government is facing two major challenges: To secure international legitimacy and to put the country internally in order. Political consolidation has not been achieved so far.

The reported controversy between the first deputy prime minister, and head of the political office in Qatar Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and the powerful Taliban Haqqani group have raised many questions. The issue has subsided for now with clarifications issued by both sides, but it remained a major news in the international media.

Another challenge for the government is about the scattered incidents of violence in some parts of the country. Islamic State of Khurasan or ISK has claimed responsibility for a number of bomb attacks and target killings.

Some administrative changes brought about in the eastern provinces of Kunar and Nangarhar reveal the intensity of the threat, although the Taliban leadership stated that they can handle Daesh or ISK by themselves do not need any outside support.

Some reported killings of the former government officials by the Taliban fighters have prompted Defence Minister Maulvi Mohammad Yaqoob to issue instructions with warnings to the forces to avoid such incidents.

"I direct you all to avoid revenge killings by yourselves as there is general amnesty to all by the Islamic Emirate", Maulvi Yaqoob said in an audio message to the fighters and local commanders. "If you still want to take your personal revenge, then you have to file a case with the justice department to try the alleged killers."

And he warned: "If you continue to defy the orders, then strict action will be taken against you. You will be arrested and removed from your posts."



The Taliban decision to stop girls from attending school beyond grade 6 also invited criticism from around the world. The Taliban tried to defend the decision as saying that there is no ban on the girls' education, and that the government is trying to formulate a policy for the female students under the Islamic shariah.

Once the policy is finalized, the girls will be allowed to go to schools, colleges and universities, the maintain.

Pointedly, the Taliban government has no representation from the other political groups, and women have been excluded. Thousands of women government employees have been staying at homes, as no clear cut policy has been announced about their future.

Their fate is yet to be decided, and there is utter uncertainty as to whether they would be allowed to return to their work or not. A number of women were the breadwinners of their families. There is some hope that all these issues could be resolved shortly, and these issues are under consideration.

But the critical phase is not yet over. Common people are worried about how to feed their families. The revival of economic and business activities is a huge task ahead of the Taliban government.

Reports coming out of Afghanistan reveal people are compelled to sell their household items to feed their families. Some families are struggling to manage even one decent meal a day. "In my neighbourhood, I know some families, who hardly get food once a day," a woman resident of Kabul, the capital city of Afghanistan, narrated.

She said: "There is no business and jobs for the people to earn livelihoods in a respectable manner. There is no system introduced so far to help such families by the Taliban government. Many such families do not spread their hands [euphemism for begging] for help".

A fruit vendor at the roadside told an Afghan TV channel there were no buyers in the markets. People are confused. Either they are out of money, or too afraid to venture out of their homes. “I was earning 200 to 300 Afghanis a day in the past, but now I earn less than 50 Afghanis a day”.

According to World Bank estimates, 75 percent of people in Afghanistan are poor with 43 percent of the population living in abject poverty. If the current situation persists, more people may fall below the poverty line.

There is a widespread feeling that the world needs to make an emergency humanitarian plan to help the people of Afghanistan. If the International community ignores this situation, it may devolve into the worst humanitarian crisis even seen.

The people believe the Taliban cannot overcome the prevailing poor economic situation, as it is the result of over 4 decades war and violence.

Observers say the new government in Kabul may not be able to get life back on track. This is the responsibility of the developed world to play its role and help rebuild the war-ravaged Afghanistan. The world must not repeat the 1990's scenario to abandon Afghanistan. Otherwise it may again become a headache for the international community.

Analysts say there may be political differences between the Taliban and the world on a number of issues, but it is better to engage with them. The only way is to help the common Afghans and engage with the Taliban to build the national institutions.

Billions of dollars of Afghanistan have been frozen by the United States and other countries of the developed world that have further added to the worries of the unfortunate Afghans. They have been suffering from decades of war some Afghans believe was imposed upon them.

Millions of Afghans have been living as refugees in Pakistan and other neighbouring countries for almost 40 years. If normalcy returns to their country, they can go home and help build a better future.

Thousands of government employees have left their jobs after the Taliban took over Kabul. The worst case scenario is for the salaried class, as many have not been able to return to their duties, and those who resumed their jobs have no idea when and how to get their current and pending salaries.

Some of the officials of the former government are also fearing that they may become the victims of the revenge of the Taliban.

The Taliban led Kabul government is looking to the International community to continue their financial aid as Afghanistan, being badly hit by violence, political instability and corruption, is mainly depending on international aid.

The Taliban government, or what they called it “Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan”, has inherited a number of challenges. The Taliban are eager to secure recognition of their government, but the world is observing the situation as to what the Taliban policies would be for the people of Afghanistan.

Children and women are mainly affected in wars and violence. They are vulnerable in the destabilized society. In the recent developments, when Kabul fell to the Taliban, a political vacuum was created. For several weeks, there was no government in place and life came to standstill.

International humanitarian organisations are warning that millions of Afghan children may face severe malnutrition and health issues. Services have not fully been restored to provide basic facilities to the people. Everything is in a disarray. Some services have been restored partially, but this chaos is putting many lives at risk.

“With the needs of Afghan children greater than ever before, the world cannot abandon them now”, a senior official with the UN Children's Fund (UNICEF) said after concluding a visit to the country a while back.



Not only have some been forced from their homes and cut off from their schools and friends, they have also been deprived of basic healthcare that can protect them against polio, tetanus and other diseases.

“Now, with a security crisis, skyrocketing food prices, a severe drought, the spread of Covid-19, and another harsh winter just around the corner, children are at greater risk than ever,” he warned.

UNICEF has predicted that if the current trend continues, one million under-fives in Afghanistan will face severe acute malnutrition, a life-threatening condition. Mr. Laryea-Adjei said more than four million children, including 2.2 million girls, are out of school.

Some of the International agencies have been visiting Afghanistan to engage with the Taliban and they are sensitizing the world about the on ground situation in Afghanistan. This is now the responsibility of the outside world to help the people of Afghanistan, especially the weak segments of the society.

The Taliban needs technical and financial assistance to cope with the situation. The world should draw a line between politics and humanitarian support. There is an urgent need for the world to extend their financial support to avoid another tragedy in the offing.

Amnesty or Reckoning?

Even as some in Islamabad's policy circles advocate amnesty for Pakistani Taliban, TTP militants seem to have ramped up violence.



By Dr Ashraf Ali

The rise of the Taliban in Afghanistan seems to have given rise to heightened militant activity in Pakistan, at least partly attributable to the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) militants formerly in Afghan government custody who were freed by the Taliban.

Following the military operation Zarb-e-Azab in June 2014, the FATA based Pakistani Taliban were forced to seek refuge in Afghanistan's eastern province of Kunar and Nooristan that straddle the tribal belt of Pakistan. Resultantly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), an umbrella organisation of over 40 militant groups stated melting down.

The Omar Khahlid Khurasani led Jamat ul Ahrar was the last one to part ways with the parent organisation after developing differences with the TTP's leadership in late 2014. The militant organisation, however, received a major setback after the death of its leader Mullah Fazlullah in a US drone attack that literally shattered its weakening foundations.

During this time the TTP made its presence on the ground felt only by small-time militant activities including roadside bombings, target killings and kidnappings for ransom. But the militant organisation got strength in August last year after the reunion of its splinter groups – Jamat ul Ahrar and Hisb ul Ahrar – under its new leader Mufti Noor Wali.

Lately, the stunning victories of the Afghan Taliban on the battlefronts and later political developments unfolding in Afghanistan encouraged them to intensify their militant activities on Pakistani soil. During this time the militants intensified their militant attacks on military personnel, government functionaries, aid workers and other civilian installations.

According to some official estimates over 50 people have been targeted killed in over 47 such incidents in the newly merged areas (former FATA) during the current year.

Locals say armed men can be seen roaming the streets and bazars of Mir Ali and Miran

Shah in North Waziristan in double cabin cars with tinted glass windows forcibly picking up people. There have also been reports of people picked up by these thugs being beaten up, tortured, and even killed.

Kidnapping for ransom is on the rise in the area. People can also be seen collecting contributions for the extremist group in the public places. The locals also complained of the rising activities of extortionists. Members of business community have been receiving calls from the gangsters and those not meeting their demands have suffered unpleasant consequences.

Scores of the Pakistani Taliban were released from the Afghan prisons following the Afghan Taliban takeover of Kabul last month. The former deputy Amir of the TTP Mullah Faqir Muhammad vowed to carry out his jihadist activities after the militant commander was freed along with other militants from Bagram jail in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, people's anger and frustration over the worsening law and

order situation, rising target killings, price hike and lack of economic activities in the former FATA are increasing with every passing day. The hopes for betterment they had pinned on the merger process have been dashed with little development on the ground.

The people of these areas want a safe and secure tomorrow for their kids and coming generations. Their disappointment cannot fail to play into the hands of anti-merger lobbies and spoilers. The month-long sit-in by the Janikhel tribe against the target killing of one Malik Gul Naseeb Khan should be an eye opener for the political managers of the country.

The decades-long political and judicial vacuum coupled with bad governance and massive corruption in state institutions in the former FATA ultimately led people to develop a sense of frustration and deprivation against the existing system.

The strange set of rules imposed on FATA had no space for liberal voices. People had been excluded from political process. They had no say in the decision-making process. The masses had no right to vote, hold a public office and represent their communities on any democratic forum. It was the turbaned malik who used to represent the community on these forums.

Sick and fed up with the draconian Frontier Crimes Regulations (FCR), the people had little choice but to join any force that could guarantee them easy access to justice, economic opportunities and social well-being.

The Taliban were able to exploit the widespread discontent and the gullible among the masses played into their hands, taking up arms against the state and challenging the writ of the government, plunging the region and later entire country into the decades-long war and militancy.

The militant after grabbing power in the region started cutting those roots that they viewed as linking the state with society. Hence the tribal elders and maliks remained the prime target of the militants. Media persons were the next victims. They were tortured, intimidated and killed.

Next, they turned towards schools as they viewed the future educated lot a potential

threat to their interests in the region. Over 1,000 schools were blown up in the former FATA while 420 schools were damaged and destroyed in Swat between 2007 and 2009.

Now there is probably a realisation within the government circles that terrorists could be defeated but terrorism as a concept is hard to defeat. The alternative is to engage with them through meaningful dialog. The way things have turned out in Afghanistan clearly demonstrates that dialog is the only viable avenue to peace in the 21st century.

There is a realisation in the Pakistani policy circles that those who went wrong are also sons of the soil. They should not be abandoned, rather they should be listened to. The statement from the Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi is seen by many in that context.



While talking to the Independent, Shah Mehmood Qureshi said if the Taliban shun violence and respect the country's constitution 'we are even open to give them a pardon'. President Dr Arif Alvi too, just a few days before, had given similar signals while talking to Dawn News

The statement generated heated debates in the country's social and political circles. The public opinion is divided on the mode and mechanism of the amnesty. Some want the militant Taliban rehabilitated in society while others recommend capital punishment for the wrongdoers, arguing forgiving the brutal killers of the innocent Pakistanis would be a betrayal of the blood of the martyrs.

However, a section of the society, while calling the Taliban sons of the soil ask for

their reintegration into the society. They argue there are small-time militants who somehow joined the groups are now ready to renounce violence and be part of the society but they can hardly find any outlet to leave.

They should be provided a safe passage to dissociate from their mentors. These small-time combatants could be rehabilitated into the society after passing through a rigorous rehabilitation program under the state supervision.

We have gone through the same experiences in the past. After the Operation Rah-e-Rast against the Swat based militants, the government initiated a rehabilitation program under the name of Sabwoon. Under the program, small-time combatants were imparted technical education in their respective fields before getting

them rehabilitated into the society and quite a good number of combatants successfully passed out.

But it is an irony that the same program was stopped only because of lack of funds. Experiences show in this case the militants after feeling themselves an unnecessary part of the society, most often, take up arms again and join the ranks of militant organizations.

The government needs to devise a well thought out rehabilitation strategy for the ex-combatants. It needs to identify gaps and loopholes in the previous rehabilitation efforts by carefully studying the successful rehabilitation strategies and programs around the world. The government can benefit from the models of Saudi Arabia and Sri Lanka.

Why the New Cold War Promises to be Different from the Old

The West is not as cohesive as it used to be, and China is a far cry from the Soviet Union of yesteryears.



By Umer Farooq

With the United States scrambling to cobble together a united front of its traditional allies against the rising threat of Chinese military and economic power in Asia-Pacific, a New Cold War is emerging on the horizon of international politics.

As part of this attempt, Washington is making every effort to shore up the military capabilities of western allies in order to build up their deterrent capability, especially in the South China Sea – a region long considered a military flashpoint primarily because of its potential for a military conflict between regional powers.

At the receiving end of American generosity this time is Australia, a part of the political West, although geographically situated in the Asia-Pacific region. Australia was part of the Western bloc during the Cold War.

The English speaking countries have had a special defence and intelligence cooperation understanding since World War II. However, in what is being seen as an effort to counter an ascendant China, the UK, US and Australia announced a historic security pact in the Asia-Pacific the other week.

The pact will let Australia build nuclear-powered submarines for the first time, using technology provided by the US. Aukus pact, which will also cover artificial intelligence (AI) and other technologies, is one of the countries' biggest defence partnerships in decades.

China has condemned the agreement as "extremely irresponsible". Foreign ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said it "seriously undermines regional peace and stability and intensifies the arms race". China's embassy in Washington accused the countries of a "Cold War mentality and ideological prejudice". The pact also created a row with France, which has now lost a deal with Australia to build 12 submarines.

What's so special about nuclear submarines?

Nuclear Submarines are much faster and harder to detect than conventionally powered fleets. They can stay submerged for months, shoot missiles longer distances and also carry more. Having them stationed in Australia is critical to US influence in the region.

This is the first time in fifty years that the US has shared its submarine technology with a foreign nation besides the UK. The deal will enable Australia to become just the seventh nation in the world to operate nuclear-powered submarines, after the US, UK, France, China, India and Russia. Australia has reaffirmed it has no intention of obtaining nuclear weapons.

Meanwhile New Zealand said it would ban Australia's submarines from its waters in line with an existing policy on the presence of nuclear-powered submarines. New Zealand, although a Five Eyes member, has been more cautious in aligning with either the US or China in the Pacific. Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern said her nation had not been approached to join the pact.

However this time the United States, the leader of western world, is witnessing cracks in the western world right from the start. The Aukus agreement has also caused annoyance among the non-western allies of Washington, like India.

The Aukus agreement, widely seen as an effort to counter China's influence in the contested South China Sea, ended a deal



worth USD 37 billion (GBP 27 billion) signed by Australia in 2016 with France to build twelve conventional submarines.

French foreign minister Jean-Yves Le Drian has described it as a “stab in the back” that constitutes “unacceptable behaviour between allies and partners”. And in a rare step among allies, French President Emmanuel Macron ordered the recall of the French ambassadors to Washington and Canberra.

The European Union has said it is “analysing” the impact of the Aukus agreement on its trade negotiations with Australia, which are due to resume in October.

The second adverse reaction is expected to come from New Delhi, another of Washington’s close allies against China and a country with which the United States recently signed an agreement for the sharing of nuclear technology.

New Delhi has not officially responded to the Aukus partnership that will see Australia ramping up its deterrence capabilities, at a time when the US and its allies are seeking to counter China’s rising influence in the region. However Indian media is reporting that Indian defence officials are expressing unease over this development.

Shekhar Sinha, a retired vice-admiral and former commander in the Indian Navy, said the nuclear-powered submarines would have a “significant impact” on the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. But former Indian naval chief Arun Prakash, in a Twitter post last week, suggested the partnership may have disgruntled New Delhi.

In 2008, India and the US signed a deal in which the US agreed to work towards full

civil nuclear cooperation with India in exchange for India separating its civil and military nuclear facilities and placing all its civil nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency safeguards. The deal did not cover military nuclear cooperation.

In subsequent years the two countries signed four foundational pacts covering deep military cooperation and access to sophisticated weapons. However, again, the deals did not cover military nuclear technology.

Srinath Raghavan, professor of history and international relations at Ashoka University, said it was unrealistic to expect the US to share military nuclear technology with India. “Why should we expect the US to share such know-how? India is not an ally or bound to the US by any treaty,” he said, noting Australia had been a close ally of the US since World War II.

There is a flip side to this development for Canberra as China has until recently been the biggest trading partner of Australia.

Australia has ridden the China bonanza for nearly two decades, earning windfalls from mineral exports and income gains from cheap imports. That continues for now, with China’s punitive trade actions targeting commodities from coal to barley, lobsters and wine, but leaving iron ore untouched.

Relations have soured since 2018, when Australia barred Huawei Technologies Co., from building its 5G network, and went into freefall last year as Prime Minister Scott Morrison led calls for an independent probe into the origins of the coronavirus that first emerged in China.

Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesman Zhao

Lijian made clear in July that the trade sanctions were in retaliation for Australia’s actions.

The reaction from France would mean that this time around Washington would not have the luxury of backing the whole political West in its confrontation with China, the Eastern superpower. In fact, the cracks in the Western world are visible from the get go.

This is reminiscent of the time when Western imperialist powers were fighting among themselves over markets in the lands outside Europe. They wanted markets for their industrial products and fought repeated wars among themselves to capture as many foreign lands as markets and sources of raw material as possible.

Seen in this light, this is primarily a conflict over who gets to sell big-ticket military hardware to a second rate military power in the Asia-Pacific. British Prime Minister Boris Johnson has said the friction in British-French relations is temporary. But given the fact that high financial stakes are involved, this friction may well last a while.

But this is hardly the only stumbling block in the way of Washington being able to put up a united front against its Eastern rival in the new Cold War. If anything, OBOR (One Belt One Road) may by its nature exert a larger force to fray the Western line up.

A globe-encompassing network of communication and trade links being developed by China, it will weave European cities in a tight web of economic and financial interests with the rest of the world and in particular with China, eventually making it difficult for Washington to politically isolate Beijing.

How should Pakistan handle the Blame Game?



By Mushahid Hussain Syed

During a recent webinar hosted by an Indian General, while there was a lot of sulking at the Taliban capture of Kabul on Indian Independence Day, August 15, 2021, the General facetiously concluded the event announcing that “I want to hand over a gold medal to Pakistan for its superb handling of the Afghanistan issue”, to which I retorted “since we didn’t get a single medal at the Tokyo Olympics, this is a welcome gesture”!

Pakistani policy makers should have anticipated the fallout because of Islamabad’s perceived ‘success’ in Afghanistan, given also the ‘I told you so’ smug satisfaction being expressed within the country, both publicly and privately.

Interestingly, so far, neither the President of the United States, in his policy speech of August 31 or of September 7, nor his vocal predecessor who may well become his successor in 2024, nor the serving American Generals have blamed Pakistan for the debacle in Afghanistan. The US Secretary of State, Tony Blinken, has made some critical noises of ‘reassessment’ of US relations with Pakistan. Mr Blinken should be asked as to what is it precisely that he’s so upset about, which warrants plans to ‘reassess’ US ties with Pakistan. It was the American war and the American strategy in Afghanistan that failed, a failure which we as friends had forewarned them in writing, way back in 2010, via General Kayani’s 14-page Memo to President Obama.

The United States asked Pakistan for release of the Taliban leadership (Mullah Baradar, notably) and then pleaded with us to push the Taliban to start talks with them in Doha, where the Americans had already arranged for the opening of the Taliban office, courtesy Qatar. The US also unilaterally released 5 top Taliban leaders they had imprisoned in Guantanamo on ‘terrorism’ charges to ensure their participation in the Doha talks. The US then held formal, direct talks for 18 months with the Taliban, including Sirajuddin Haqqani, whose signed OpEd was printed in The New

York Times on February 20, 2020. And the President of the United States personally phoned to congratulate Mullah Baradar on the successful signing of the peace deal with the Taliban on February 29, 2020, all these developments conferring legitimacy on the Taliban and facilitating their return to power.

The US Centcom Commander personally negotiated in Kabul with the Taliban on August 15, 2021, on the ‘rules of the game’ of the American evacuation, which was completed by August 31. During this period, the CIA Chief also visited Kabul to meet with the Taliban leadership and he came twice to Islamabad seeking help during the ‘last lap’ of the American occupation, which Pakistan happily provided.

Secretary Blinken is talking of ‘reassessment’ when the US has already taken two strategic decisions that directly impinge on Pakistan’s national security: our adversary, India, as their best friend and strategic partner in South Asia, and our closest ally, China, as their strategic rival, competitor and adversary, along with Russia. No ambiguity at all, on both these counts.

The more serious issue is the resolution of the European Parliament on Afghanistan passed on September 16, which is quite comprehensive, with a damning indictment of the ‘corrupt Kabul political elite’ including seeking an investigation of financial misappropriation by the ‘failed leadership of Ashraf Ghani’. The long resolution is also a critique of the manner of the unilateral American exit done without consulting European allies, plus takes a few pot-shots at Pakistan too. While stating Pakistan “bears responsibility for security and stability in Afghanistan”, there’s a Blinken-like threat to review the EU’s GSP-Plus given to Pakistan. At the same time, it offers increased support to countries ‘hosting large numbers of (Afghan) migrants and refugees’! However, there is no appreciation of Pakistan’s pivotal role in the evacuation of EU citizens

post-Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, although individual EU leaders have publicly acknowledged Pakistan's humanitarianism.

More importantly, the Resolution also outlines future steps that the European Union must take, for instance, "a comprehensive lesson-based strategy as regards Afghanistan and other countries in the surrounding region". This provides an opening for Pakistan to engage with the EU and its Parliament to present its fact-based perspective on our role.

And this is where Pakistan's problem lies. There's a propensity for blaming others, cribbing or criticising, or whining about our own victimhood, or attributing events like the New Zealand cricket tour's cancellation to unsubstantiated conspiracy-theories. Let's get the facts right to resolve the core issue in the current scenario: our abysmal failure to craft or sell a credible narrative. Three problems are noteworthy.

First, at the level of the Pakistani government or State, there has been NO serious strategic engagement with either the international (read, Western) media, the United States Congress or the European Parliament, or the international think tank circuit. None whatsoever at all!



Second, as far as foreign policy goes, it's a case of 'confusion worse confounded'! Five power centres are currently dabbling in foreign policy: a) the PM who likes to pontificate on foreign policy from time to time; b) the Foreign Office, which presents the 'officially-certified truth' in a somewhat sanitised manner; c) the COAS, who directly handles Military Diplomacy in four key areas: China, US, India and Afghanistan; d) the ISI Chief, who executes the directions of his Boss; e) 'Talk Show Ministers', who peddle, in their own convoluted manner, the 'all is well' mantra on every foreign policy issue at nightly interactions on national television. The end result: a half-baked product for domestic consumption fails to find any traction abroad, except as an ad hoc, moment-to-moment 'fire-fighting exercise'.

Third, there's the problem of the Pakistani DNA, a proclivity for passivity, plus a reactive or a waiting approach. I remember, during my student days in Lahore, reading an apt article about this Pakistani mindset by a reputed scholar and psychologist, Dr Ajmal, who later became Vice Chancellor of the Punjab University. In his famous article, "A Nation of Waiters", Dr Ajmal noted the passivity of most Pakistanis who were always 'waiting' for something to happen: some are 'waiting' to get a job, others 'waiting' to get married and some even 'waiting' for a Revolution! Similarly, for most of 2021, the foreign policy machinery of the Pakistan Government has been 'waiting' for a phone call from President Biden, as if it's a test of our diplomatic manhood!

So, what are the Do's and Don'ts in the single most important national security and foreign policy challenge for Pakistan since 9/11. First the Don'ts: Don't act as spokesman for the Afghan Taliban; Don't crib all the time about 'conspiracies being hatched against Pakistan'; Don't overpromise on what we can deliver.

Regarding the Do's: first and foremost, behave with Dignity, Pakistan's destiny will not be determined by one phone call from a faraway capital; strategic clarity about 'red lines' on foreign policy (Nuclear program, Kashmir, Indian hegemony, ties with China, Russia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran, CPEC/regional connectivity, No New Cold War); offer cooperation to US/West on counter-Terrorism, Afghanistan stability, Pakistan's willingness to participate, as hub of regional connectivity: BRI, TAPI, EU's 'Global Gateway', Biden's B3W, even revival of IPI (Iran-Pakistan-India) Pipeline.

Recent developments provide Pakistan with 'strategic space' and more autonomy and greater regional room to manoeuvre, together with our friends and partners. Pakistan's importance has been enhanced, as Islamabad is viewed as the key conduit to Kabul. Therefore, it's time to get cracking for a national, above partisan politics, proactive and prudent strategy that seizes the opportunity to promote peace and stability in the strife torn region after 42 years.

(The writer, a former Minister for Information, is currently Chairman of the Senate Defence Committee)



Exchanging gifts increases love



By Hammad Ghaznavi

Prime Minister Imran Khan has been championing, rightly so, the cause of accountability of rulers. If there is no accountability in a political system, the rulers are corrupt, he has been ferociously advocating. Rightly so. "It is taxpayer's money, kissi kay baap ka paisa nahin hai," is a famous, oft-quoted line of Mr Khan. On more occasions than one, he has quoted an occurrence involving the second rightly guided caliph, Hazrat Umar (RA), wherein a companion of the prophet asked the caliph about the two pieces of cloths he was wearing while everyone else got one piece from the war booty. The caliph explained it to the 'citizen' that the second piece of cloth was that of his son. Accountability was the cornerstone of Riasat e Madina, Mr Khan always underlined.

Ironically, now Mr Khan, so it seems, has different views on the subject. A citizen, Abrar Khalid, submitted an application to the Pakistan Information Commission to know the details of gifts received by the incumbent prime minister in the last three years. The PIC directed the Cabinet Division to furnish the said details. The Division, however, refusing the information, moved the Islamabad High Court questioning the purview of the PIC. In its petition, the government argued that it is classified/secret information, and divulging it is against 'national interest', can damage Pakistan's image, and hurt its relations with other countries. The government also argued that the details of Toshakhana would get undue media hype and lead to 'Fake News.'

Accountability is the fundamental principle of democracy. The elected representatives of people are answerable to the voters. Citizens have the 'right to know', ensured in the constitutions governing democratic dispensations. Transparency and good governance are interlinked, and dependent on laws and practices ensuring citizens' access to information, particularly on money matters, as all money in a democratic system is considered taxpayers' money.

What gifts were received by the Prime Minister from the foreign dignitaries is classified information? Why? Has he received tanks and sub-marines? Has he received something illegal? Slaves? What? Our rulers have traditionally avoided

sharing such information with the masses but this stance by Mr Khan is like carrying the joke too far.

The government also believed that making this information public will get 'unnecessary' media hype. Going by that principle the rise in electricity, petroleum and LNG prices shall also be implemented without announcement as such news gets lots of 'unnecessary' media hype. Real or imaginary, every scandal of the government from Malam Jabba to BRT Peshawar and Billion Tree to Rawalpindi Ring Road project gets loads of media hype. What shall be done about it? Divulging the details of gifts from the heads of friendly countries to the Pakistani PM is against 'National Interest'? A list of gifts like carpets, watches and swords will damage inter-state relations? The argument is not even funny!

Revealing does not, it's the hiding of facts from the public that leads to rumours and fake news. And that's exactly what is happening in this case as well. Mr Khan's detractors are spreading all kinds of 'fake news' about the precious gifts that he has received from the ruler of an Arab state and so on. This maligning of the PM shall stop forthwith, and the proper way to do it is making the list of gifts public. It is a constitutional obligation of the government under article 19-A, period.

According to Toshakhana laws it is simple. The PM can retain the gifts worth under Rs 30,000 and those worth more can be retained by paying 50 percent of the gift value, determined by a special committee of the cabinet division. Even if the PM has retained any gift after paying 50 percent of its value, that's absolutely legal. This is not a 'National Security' issue.

There are two former PMs, Nawaz Sharif and Yusuf Raza Gillani, and a former president, Asif Ali Zardari, who have references against them in a Toshakhana case, based on the information provided by the cabinet division. In that case, Nawaz Sharif has been declared an absconder and loads of his property has been attached. Mr Khan, you said do nahin aik Pakistan. It is exactly the same case. Mr PM is advised not to hide behind any legal smoke. It is time to live upto one's reputation as 'Mr Clean'.

Global Tech Giants Looking to Set up Shop at Islamabad Technopolis

If done right, the STZs could make Pakistan an ICT powerhouse within a few years.



By Azeem Waqas

Several global tech giants including over a dozen Fortune 500 companies are scrambling to book a berth at Islamabad Technopolis, a 140-acre Special Technology Zone being set up in the federal capital by Pakistan's new-fangled Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA), The Truth International (TTI) has learnt.

"Very positive and encouraging response is coming for the Islamabad Technopolis", says Chairman STZA, Amer Hashmi. Zone developers will build the large land parcels within a zone so the multiple zone developers have shown their response and Zone enterprisers are small and large companies will do business in the STZs.

Billion-dollar ICT companies are said to be among those seeking a plot of land within the 140 acres of land earmarked for Islamabad Technopolis. Hashmi said market response is phenomenal and several large ICT companies have shown interest in building their own buildings.

Global companies from Fortune 100 about 15 are serious and five are already committed to Islamabad Technopolis.

The STZA is looking to setup Special Technology Zones across the country as part of Pakistan's drive to establish knowledge economy cities. The STZA is planning to establish twelve STZs across Pakistan over one year. Some 70 technologies have been listed for STZs. However, only existing IT companies are eligible for allotment of space at subsidised rates at STZs.

Applications have started to arrive for space at Islamabad Technopolis and out of them 50 EOI have been submitted.

Hashmi says technology is important and knowledge creation is where economic growth takes place. Pakistan has never concentrated on the knowledge. If tech were not to produce knowledge then we would reconsider if we need STZs. So tech innovation entrepreneurship equals a knowledge economy which will allow Pakistan to have higher exports.

STZA national rolling out strategy for STZs consists of two components. One of these is identifying land parcels which will become tech clusters of the future. These will be built through Public Private Partnership


(PPP) model. The second component is identification of existing infrastructure and buildings to be modified as zones.

Amer Hashmi says: "The main objective of the STZs will be to create million of jobs for the age of 35 or 30 years people. It will stop brain drain from Pakistan".

Amer Hashmi is of the view that STZs should be established on war footings. Japan, Korea, Philippines, China's Shenzhen, Silicon Valley, Singapore, Hong Kong present glowing example of how to do this. India has 350 STZs.

The STZA board chair says license fee is waived of for startups. Application fee is very minimal. Startups can come in to STZs free of cost. Large startups which are in cluster can be given five acre of land. A ten-year tax holiday will be provided for the IT industry.

The idea is to commercialize knowledge-based outputs that will only happen when strong linkages are built between startups and SMES.



While elaborating the target of STZA, Amer Hashmi told that if we can get a billion dollar worth of government projects out there and we can convince PPRA to make three or four where we can quickly move on with transparency award contracts and get STZs in the cities by 30 June 2022 we can expect six billion dollars worth of domestic sales and exports companies based at these STZs, enabling Pakistan's economy to score exponential growth.

In India, First Tech SEZs were started in late 80s and early 90s. ICT circles are surprised that it's just being debated in Pakistan.

Technology expert Habibullah Khan said, "For the first time I can breathe and say that there is a plan by people who get it. Execution is everything. There will be course corrections but there is an organization that owns a critical national innovation journey".

Members of the board

The STZA board of directors consists of eleven members, six of whom represent the private sector including industries like Banking, Finance, Insurance, and Medical Education.

Prime Minister Imran Khan is the President of the STZA Board. Minister for Finance & Revenue Mr. Shaukat Tarin; Federal Minister for Industries & Production Mr. Khushro Bakhtiar; Federal Minister for IT and Telecom Mr. Syed Aminul Haque; and SAPM on Poverty Alleviation and Social Safety Dr. Sania Nishtar are on the board of STZA.

Appointed a member of the STZA board of directors, Mr. Sikandar Mustafa Khan is the Chairman of Millat Group of Companies. He is also the Vice Chairman of Board of Governors at NAMAL Institute.

Another board member, Ms. Maheen Rahman is the Chief Executive Officer of Infra ZaminPakistan, a first-of-its-kind for-profit credit enhancement facility in Pakistan. She previously served as the Chief Executive at Alfalah GHP Investment Management for seven years. With twenty

years of experience in investment banking and asset management under her belt, she has established herself as one of the most successful investment bankers in the country.

Toronto-based family physician and continuing medical education (CME) lecturer Dr. Shafiq Qaadri is also on the board. A true jack of all trades, he served as an MPP in the province of Ontario for 15 years and was the first Pakistani-Canadian to be elected to Parliament in the Province of Ontario.

Another board member is Mr. Ashar Nazim, the Group CEO of the Bahrain-based AionDigital. The company has enabled a virtual banking market for over 34 million GCC nationals. Mr. Nazim is also on the Board of Directors of Waqfe WLL, Spire Technologies Limited, and Finocracy – all FinTech companies in the GCC.

Mr. Noorur Rahman is another board member. He has more than 35 years' experience in the Accounting & Auditing profession, across Europe, Middle East and Africa, of which the last 25 years have been in various leadership roles as Assurance Leader for the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region and Audit Partner for clients ranging from investment companies, private equity houses, commercial banks, Islamic banks, government ministries, regulators, commercial entities and manufacturing industries. He is at the board of STZA.

Also on the board is Mr. Nazar Zaidi, Senior Vice President of Cores, Server SoC Systems IP Engineering, Technology and Engineering at AMD. Since joining AMD in 2016, he has successfully guided the delivery of AMD's award-winning multi-generational "Zen" x86 CPU family.

Criticism of the STZA board

Pakistan's burgeoning ICT (Information and Communication Technology) sector is perturbed over the formation of Special Technology Zones Authority (STZA) board of directors, with several prominent players

objecting to the inclusion of some members who neither have ICT background nor do they represent the industry.

Reservations have been voiced in particular over Mr. Amer Hashmi being handed the prize appointment of Chairman STZA Board, with everybody demanding inclusion of IT professionals who have demonstrated experience of the sector to promote IT industry in the country and create an enabling ecosystem for the professionals.

Industry circles say the STZA is allotting land to big companies at a subsidized rate. ICT professionals fear the STZs will become a real estate investment plan unless IT industry is given priority and taken on board. It is requisite that the rent and rate of land should not be less than half of the market value.

Another commonly voiced complaint is that the STZA is neglecting local industry, with local ICT companies not being allotted space.

STZA response to criticism

While answering the objections over the composition of board of STZA, Hashmi says there are lots of questions about the composition of the board but the board has independent members, one of whom is from Silicon Valley.

He said, "STZA board is designed not with just tech people but with people who know governance, who have a global network, and who understand how technology can help the nation".

Head of Marketing and PR STZA, Hina Nasir says, "In Pakistan you will not find a person who has experience of establishing special technology zone and is not taken on board of directors".

She denied the reservations of local companies and said that "There is no discrimination with local companies if they qualify according to the rules of STZA".

Why Nadra's Newfangled Verification Service is a Quantum Leap

The contactless biometric verification service for the banking and payments industry can put Pakistan at the bleeding edge of FinTech innovation.

By Amna Shoaib

The advent of contactless biometric verification service by National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) has catapulted Pakistan at the forefront of the countries tapping cutting edge ICT systems to enable the next iteration of innovation in the banking and payments industry.

The development has been made possible by Pakistan's all-encompassing biometric national ID database on the one hand, and near-universal presence of fingerprint sensors on smart mobile devices. Equally important, the system capitalises on Nadra's world-class information technology prowess.

Now in the pilot phase, the system launched by Nadra on the request of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), makes Pakistan one of the first countries in the world to implement the technology on national level.

The service was introduced during a visit by State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Governor Dr Reza Baqir to the Nadra headquarters on 10 September, 2021. The banks in Pakistan will make use of the digital app on smartphones wherein they will be capturing and verifying biometrics of the potential account holders within the comfort of their homes as per their convenience. With the commencement of this new advanced feature in digital technology, the banking system will take a paradigm shift adding remote biometric capturing technology to the digital banking system.

The service has initially been made applicable to five banks nominated by the SBP for a pilot project. Other banks and SBP-licensed EMIs (Electronic Money Institutions) may also join the pilot run after completion of necessary formalities. Once the pilot is completed, this service will be extended to all banks and EMIs.

SBP governor sees endless potential in new technology to reach the under-served population. The SBP governor said: "This new mobile-based verification service for banks and Electronic Money Institutions is in line with SBP's financial inclusion initiative while

creating opportunities for rapid on-boarding using remote identification and e-KYC features."

He further added, "Early adoption of this new technology has endless potential to reach the under-served population while it extends a great benefit to the financial sector as it will reduce the operational costs, aiding in releasing pressure on banks which have been negatively impacted during this pandemic."

"We are addressing the need of the hour during this on-going pandemic" Nadra Chairman Tariq Malik said speaking at the launch event. "This new technology makes contactless fingerprint acquisition and matching possible using a smart mobile phone, providing an alternative to conventional methods of conducting digital financial transactions that may require specialised equipment or visits to bank branches or franchises."

"Nadra is proud to maintain its reputation for introducing niche technological trends in the country. It is another step towards our aim of creating a robust National ID EcoSystem in Pakistan."

Banks have started development work to tap this new service. Nadra will also be providing this service to the Electronic Money Institutions (EMIs) as well as branchless banking providers.

Making profit out of Nadra's innovative product, the banks and EMIs are likely to start offering new digital banking services to their customers whereby bank customers will be able to open bank accounts and wallets and conduct biometric based financial transactions using their mobile phone cameras from the ease of their homes.

"This will not only revolutionise how banking and payments services are offered in the country but will also compliment the financial inclusion drive," said Nadra chairman Nadra, who introduced a similar mobile verification service for Online ID Services (Pak ID) earlier that was launched by Prime Minister Imran Khan on 1 September, 2021.



Will Poor Prosecution Be the Undoing of Noor Mukadam Case?

Criminals often go scot free because of the prosecutors' inability to build watertight cases.



By Asadullah

Noor Mukadam case looks set to become yet another exemplar of the chronic problem of investigating officers failing to build a case that will stand judicial scrutiny.

As the additional district and sessions judge (ADSJ) commenced the trial of Zahir Jaffer, his parents and other accomplices in the gruesome murder in the elite sector of Islamabad, the report (challan) submitted by the police is marred by substandard investigation, which may benefit the suspects.

The investigation report of the police prepared under section 173 of the Criminal Procedure Code (CrPC) is a set of documents that is presented by the prosecution to substantiate allegations against the accused persons.

Briefly speaking, the police challan mainly focused on one single point – lack of cooperation – of the about a dozen co-accused led beheading of Noor Mukadam as her life saving opportunities due to

active connivance of the accomplices of principal accused Zahir went in futility.

The challan stated that Noor tried to escape twice from the illegal captivity of Zahir Jaffer. However, her attempts were thwarted due to the active collusion of the security guard and gardener.

The report says Zahir Jaffer contacted his father four times over phone while he kept Noor captive and murdered her. His parents knew about the illegal detention and the worsening situation at their home but they never informed the police.

Even after the culprit had beheaded the girl, his father Zakir Jaffer showed no remorse and told the murderer, “You needn’t worry, I can handle this. I am sending the people to rescue you and to dispose of the dead body”.

The police investigation mainly relied upon the confessional statement of Zahir Jaffer, in which he confessed to killing Noor stating that they quarreled after the victim

rejected his marriage proposal. She threatened to file a complaint against Zahir with the police.

As per the statement, Zahir informed his parents of this incident and ordered the domestic staff not to allow anyone to come inside or let her go outside from the house. This was why the gatekeeper and gardener prevented her attempts to escape.

Referring the Call Detail Record (CDR), the challan stated that before killing and beheading Noor, Zahir made calls to his parents at 2:21 pm, 3:00 pm, 6:35 pm and 7:29 pm. “Noor Mukadam’s murder could have been averted had Zahir Jaffer informed the police in time”.

The report says Zakir Jaffer sent five therapy work staff to his F-7/4 residence – the crime scene of the gruesome murder – to conceal the evidence and the dead body of deceased. However, when they tried to enter to the room, Zahir got confused and attacked them.

One worker Amjad Mehmood was injured in the ensuing struggle and had to seek medical help. However, the injured worker lied to the hospital administration and did not register the incident in the medical slip. He mentioned reason for his injury was a road accident.

On 19 July, Noor's father Shaukat Mukadam went to cattle market to buy sacrificial goat in the afternoon and found Noor was not at home upon return. His wife tried to call Noor, but her phone was found switched off.

Later on, they received a call later from Noor, who told them she was going Lahore with some friends for a couple of days. Zahir Jaffer also phoned Shaukat Mukadam, saying Noor was not with him.

However, at about 10 pm on 20 July, he received a call from Kohsar Police Station and was informed that his daughter has been killed. He went to the house and found Noor's beheaded dead body.

The police has recovered a knife and a 9 mm pistol along with the magazine, a knuckleduster, cigarette butts, an Apple laptop, Zahir's blood stained shirt, finger prints, CCTV footage, CDR, medical reports, cell phones.

Moreover, the police have included 18 witnesses, which included constables and the doctors who conducted autopsy of Noor Mukadam.

Criticism

It is said that the police did not make effort to investigate the crime in the broader prospect and confined it within the boundary wall of Jaffer family. For example, a criminal law expert said that the investigation officer should have recorded the statement of common friends of Zahir Jaffer and Noor Mukadam who gathered outside the house.

The low paid therapy worker Amjad, who was the eyewitness of the crime who got injured by Zahir Jaffer's knife was taken into custody and has been booked as an accomplice for not reporting the reason of his injury in the medical slip of the hospital.

Subsequently, since almost all the witnesses are government officials, therefore, the defence counsel may take plea that these

are not independent witnesses, senior lawyer Raja Inam Ameen Minhas said.

The legal experts opined that the police investigation was not up to the mark despite the fact that the Prime Minister Imran Khan has personally assured the nation of justice in the Noor Mukadam's murder case.

Despite the high profile case, the investigation was conducted by an inspector level officer who rose to the present rank about three decades ago and is now nearing retirement.



However, the 'inefficiency' may not be the only reason for substandard investigation in the high profile cases, as there are number of other variables that contributed in flawed investigation.

It may be mentioned that last year, a report on the police capability to investigate the crimes which was submitted by the then Inspector General admitted that the police lacked capacity to investigate crimes.

In the report, the IG said that the investigation officer (IO) of a case had to pay PKR 5,000 parcel fee from his own pocket to send evidence to a forensic laboratory for analysis.

The IG noted that it took around two

months to send evidence to laboratory for analysis. "An IO should be given the authority to send evidence to a laboratory without waiting for the approval of high officials," he suggested.

Similarly, he said, an IO paid PKR 15,000 for preparation of a sketch of a suspect. "Such a sketch should be prepared within two days."

The most alarming aspect of the system is that an investigation officer receives a puny PKR 300 to probe a serious crime.

The Advocate General Islamabad Niazullah Khan Niazi says the successive governments have never attached priority to establishing a proper prosecution department in the federal capital.

He says underpaid investigating officers do not have sufficient resources to visit a crime scene when a crime is reported, let alone send the sealed samples and arrange payment of the fee to a laboratory for conducting forensic examinations.

He however expressed hope that the steps taken by the incumbent government for swift and inexpensive administration of justice will modernize the prosecution and would enhance capabilities of the investigation officers.

Between Despair and Hope

Recovery is setting in but surging imports, ballooning circular debt, the yawning current account deficit, and the bleeding rupee continue to pose challenges.



By Khalique Ahmad

The structural weaknesses that the government failed to address during the historic slowdown of recent years are coming back to haunt Pakistan's economy just as economic activities start to recover.

Imports, including those of unnecessary luxury items, have surged, the Pak rupee is bleeding value, and the energy sector circular debt is ballooning as aggressively as ever.

Irrespective of their political affiliation or economic school of thought, all experts worthy of note agree that the economic challenges Pakistan faced three years ago are re-emerging, although they may have differing views on the scale and scope of the challenges.

The sudden jump in imports in the last two-three months has worried almost everybody, irrespective of any political divide. For reference: imports in the first two months of the current fiscal have increased by a massive 74 percent to USD 6 billion – widely outpacing 28 percent growth in exports to USD 3.58 billion.

The greater cause of concern is that food, automobile, and petroleum imports are growing much faster (at 85 to 235 percent) than machinery and metal groups (at 52 to 83 percent).

Even finance minister Shaukat Tarin and Governor State Bank of Pakistan concede that the economy is heating up and they have to take immediate steps to stem overheating that could have long lasting ramifications.

In one of his recent pressers, Mr Tarin announced steps – regulatory duties and 100 percent cash margins – to curb imports. “My concern is that the economy should not overheat to a level that creates problems for the exchange rate and balance of payment”, the minister said.

The government has therefore decided to impose regulatory duties and 100 percent cash payments for opening of letters of credits for non-essential luxury imports. But subsequent measures announced by SBP showed the axe falling on luxury car imports and their financing facilities.

The finance minister said these corrective measures were important to cool down the heating economy. Some quarters were suggesting the GDP was heading beyond 5 percent growth and we want to control it, we don't want to jump to 6-7 percent growth quickly as that could be problematic and unsustainable.

He believes the pressures on the exchange rate developed owing to higher imports, dollar outflows to Afghanistan, and negative perceptions that speculators and importers also exploited.

But the stage had already been set by the SBP in its latest Monetary Policy Statement which said “the pace of the economic recovery had exceeded expectations” and that recovery in domestic demand coupled with higher international commodity prices were leading to a strong pick-up in imports and a rise in the current account deficit.

The central bank believes that at this more mature stage of the recovery, a greater emphasis is needed on ensuring the appropriate policy mix to protect

the longevity of growth, to keep inflation expectations anchored, and to slow the growth in the current account deficit.

There was some blame sharing as well. “Over the last few months the burden of adjusting to the rising current account deficit had fallen primarily on the exchange rate and it was appropriate for other adjustment tools, including interest rates, to also play their due role” even though it noted that the stance of monetary policy was still appropriately supportive of growth, with real interest rates remaining negative on a forward-looking basis.

The SBP promised monetary policy to remain accommodative in the near term, with possible further gradual tapering of stimulus to achieve mildly positive real interest rates over time along with fiscal policy adjustments.

The SBP also forecast growth in FY22 toward the upper end of the forecast range of 4-5 percent, notwithstanding some greater uncertainty with respect to spill over from the evolving situation in Afghanistan.

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) in the latest edition of its flagship regional economic update forecast Pakistan's economic growth rate at 4 percent for current fiscal year – slightly higher than 3.9 percent of last fiscal year – provided private investments and business activities pick up with steady vaccine rollout.

This is close to 4.2 percent growth forecast by Fitch Solutions – a research subsidiary of the Fitch Ratings – and significantly lower than Pakistan's budget target of 4.8 percent.

But the most important thing in ADB's assessment is based on expected resumption of structural reform. “The economic outlook is clouded, however, by high uncertainty because it is closely tied to the course of the pandemic in Pakistan and globally”.

The ADB believes the industrial growth to improve in FY2022, driven by fiscal incentives announced in the FY2022 budget, a substantial rise in development spending, and strong private consumption underpinned by adequate agricultural harvests, strong remittance inflow, and a pickup in earnings as social restrictions are reduced and most economic activity resumes.

Enhanced growth in agriculture and industry and an expected improvement in domestic demand are projected to boost growth in services, strengthening their contribution to growth in FY2022.

The ADB also forecast that inflationary pressures will likely come from ongoing economic recovery and rising global oil prices but should be tempered by expenditure reform and the government's commitment not to borrow directly from the central bank.

Pakistan's public debt outlook is sustainable in the medium term. With strong economic growth prospects for FY2022 and beyond, public debt remains on a downward path over the medium term.



In a recent paper, independent economist Dr Hafiz A Pasha forecast the debt servicing to rise by over 11 percent in 2021-22, with much faster growth in the cost of servicing external debt – the largest claimant of public resources. He estimated the public debt to grow by 9 percent and after adjustment for growth in nominal GDP, the public debt-to-GDP ratio could fall from 83.5 percent to 79.9 percent.

He forecast the exchange rate for 2021-22 to fall to between PKR 175-185 per dollar. This could lead to higher borrowing for debt servicing, almost entirely from the banking sector, which would substantially crowd out the private sector from bank credit and put pressure on interest rates. Also, it could lead to faster increase in money supply and thus higher inflation.

Dr Pasha has drawn three very interesting scenarios. In the positive scenario, the financial account surplus reached over USD 10 billion due to the continuation of the IMF Program and positive sentiments about the economy of Pakistan. Also, global prices of commodities stabilize after the recent peaks. Home remittances continue to show positive growth.

In the negative scenario, the current account deficit could rise to USD 13 billion due to continuing surge in import prices throughout the fiscal year, remittances show little growth or even fall after resumption of air travel. With the IMF program coming to an end, the inflow into the financial account would fall by about USD 5 billion. This leads to greater pressures on the exchange rate.

There could be another scenario somewhere between the above positive and negative. “The level of reserves in all three scenarios is not high enough to provide at least three months import cover” due to the quantum jump in the current account deficit and big increase in external debt payment in 2021-22 compared to last year, he noted.

“Even in the positive scenario, the import cover is at 2.6 months. In the negative scenario, the reserves fall to a single-digit level of USD 9.2 billion, equivalent to import cover of only 1.3 months. This could usher in a period of instability.

“The projected level of total external debt ranges from USD 131.4 billion in the positive scenario to USD 126.9 billion in the negative scenario. The external debt to GDP ratio is likely to be close to 43 percent of the GDP at the end of 2021-22, showing some increase from 41 percent of the GDP in 2020-21”, he noted.

Fitch Solutions, however, expected net exports to contribute negatively to headline growth as imports outpace export growth. On the external front, heightened security threats posed by radical groups such as the Pakistani Taliban could lead to social instability and the destruction of infrastructure. This might weigh on the country's gross fixed capital outlook and exporting capabilities as businesses become hesitant to invest in capacity building infrastructure.

The Herculean Task Facing Minister Tarin

No respite for the common citizen on the horizon as Pakistan prepares to face an IMF pushing for higher utility prices



By Mehtab Haider

With two simultaneous reviews of Pakistan's IMF programme just round the corner as we go to press, the resurfacing of the fundamental imbalances of the country's economy have set alarm bells ringing at both the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank of Pakistan.

Behind the alarming situation are the so-called twin deficits: Fiscal deficit and current account deficit.

Given that such deep-seated structural imbalances cannot be tackled through window dressing, Pakistan requires to pursue medium- to long-term reforms to avoid overheating of the economy and achieve a higher growth trajectory at sustainable levels.

Pakistan and the IMF are scheduled to hold virtual review talks from 29 September 2021, for accomplishing sixth and seventh reviews simultaneously for approval of USD 1 billion under Extended Fund Facility (EFF).

The first round of talks will be technical in nature where both sides will be doing number crunching in the first week and then hold policy-level talks commencing from 5 October 2021.

The upcoming review talks will conclude in the second week of October when Pakistan's Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin visits Washington DC to attend the joint Annual Meetings of the World Bank Group and IMF, the Bretton Woods institutions charged with steering the global economy. Minister Tarin and his entourage will hold talks with the IMF on the side-lines of the Meetings.

Islamabad needs to analyse its economic situation at this juncture. Pakistan's budget deficit for the fiscal year ending 30 June 2021 has climbed to 7.1 percent of GDP, equivalent to PKR 3.043 trillion.

The budget deficit stood at 8.1 percent of GDP in the fiscal year 2019-20 and 8.9 percent of GDP in the fiscal year 2018-19,

so the average budget deficit remained hovering around 8 percent of GDP in the last three years' rule of the PTI-led coalition government.

Such high budget deficit is bound to push up the current account deficit because expansionary fiscal policies cannot sustain without increasing imports so the current account surplus had to turn into a deficit with a certain time lag.

The PTI-led regime was celebrating the short-lived current account surplus as a great achievement is now mum as the deficit has resurfaced.

Governor State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Dr. Reza Baqir has now told journalists this current account deficit should be considered it as good news for Pakistan's economy, arguing that it shows the economy is growing. The problem, however, is that it also poses a potential threat to the national economy.

The Annual Plan for 2021-22 prepared by the Ministry of Planning and approved by the Parliament had projected current account deficit for the entire fiscal year at USD 2.3 billion. In reality, the current account deficit had surged to USD 2.3 billion in the first two months (July and August) and it might touch double-digit by end of the current fiscal year.

The current account deficit stood at around USD 800 million in July 2021 and USD 1.5 billion in August 2021 so in totality, it remained to hover around USD 2.3 billion in the first two months of the current fiscal year.

The SBP had made its own projection and estimated that the current account deficit would be hovering around USD 6 billion to USD 9 billion during the current fiscal year. However, renowned economist Dr. Hafiz A Pasha has warned that the CAD might go beyond USD 12.

Against this backdrop, the monetary, fiscal, and exchange rate policies become important tools to cool down the overheating economy.

First of all, the SBP used an exchange rate anchor to allow the rupee to depreciate against the US dollar and the Pak Rupee nosedived from PKR 152 to PKR 170 against US dollar in the last four to five months despite reports that the SBP has pumped dollars in the market to stabilize the rupee.

The Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) in its statement said the flexible market-based exchange rate regime has performed well since its introduction in June 2019, including through the Covid shock. It has overseen a healthy modulation of the current account and supported a critical build-up in the country's gross and net forex reserves despite external pressures.

"Under this regime, the SBP does not suppress an underlying trend in the exchange rate and any interventions are limited to address disorderly market conditions" it added.

Since its floatation, the rupee has moved in an orderly manner in both directions and has depreciated by only 4.8 percent to date, much less than many other emerging market currencies over the same period.

Since the rupee was floated, SBP's gross foreign exchange reserves have nearly tripled to a record USD 20 billion, while net international reserves have risen by nearly USD 16 billion between end-June 2019 and end-August 2021. 8.

The MPC observed that while the flexible exchange rate has appropriately played its role as a shock absorber, it is important that its role be complemented by strong exports, targeted measures to curb nonessential imports, and appropriate macroeconomic policy settings to contain import growth.

However, independent economic experts believe that the exchange rate anchor exhausted its effectiveness and SBP was forced to hike the discount rate by 25 basis points to jack it up from 7 to 7.25 percent in the latest Monetary Policy announcement in a bid to suppress the rising demand.



On the fiscal side, the government has decided to impose 100 percent cash margins and additional regulatory duties on nonessential items in order to discourage imports and cool down the overheating economy.

It is aimed at averting the heating up of the national economy through fiscal measures as Finance Minister argued that the GDP growth should not jump up to 6 percent from 4 percent in one go as they wanted to keep it in the range of 5 percent for averting creation of imbalances on macroeconomic fronts.

On other hand, the government also launched its flagship Kamyab Pakistan Program for doling out multibillion rupees small loans to implement its bottom-up approach for uplifting the neglected segments of the country. However, the government says it has scaled down this KPP massively to align it with the IMF conditions.

The upcoming IMF talks would mainly focus on the energy sector in the context of eliminating circular debt on a permanent basis; the overall fiscal framework, Kamyab Pakistan Program; and enhanced autonomy for the SBP through amendment bill.

The hiking of power and gas tariffs will be part of IMF demands. The rupee devaluation seen in the recent past and further hikes in utility prices will push up inflationary pressures. There is no solace on the menu for the common citizen in the near future.

Pakistan's economy remains trapped in a boom-bust cycles mainly because it has failed to attract the required level of investments and savings to fuel higher growth. As a result, the country has to repeatedly witness a crisis-like situation after a pause of every IMF program in the name of stabilisation because a high growth trajectory

inevitably enlarges macroeconomic imbalances.

The high rate of inflation is another headache for the government chiefly because of supply disruption caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. It can only be tackled through enhanced productivity of the agriculture sector.

An additional worry is that Pakistan has become a net importer of food and commodities. Over the last fiscal year, Pakistan spent USD 8.4 billion on the import of wheat, sugar, cotton, pulses, palm oil, and other items.

Any headway towards a permanent solution of Pakistan's economic woes lies in enhancing the efficiency and productivity of the neglected agriculture sector. Failing what, the country will remain hostage to expensive food imports at the prices prevailing in the international market.

Is PM Khan Finally Ready to Tackle Inflation?

Parsing the government's recent shift to a hands-on approach to inflation in the face of the IFI's prescriptions pointing in the opposite direction.



By Meer Diam

After leaving the common citizen at the mercy of the market forces for three years, the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan has apparently decided to take the bull of inflation by the horns, announcing massive cuts in the prices of major food items and indicating a return to the magisterial intervention to stem profiteering.

Addressing a hurriedly called press conference Finance Minister announced PKR 40-50 per kg cut in edible oil prices assuring that sugar will be available at PKR 89.75 per kg and the flour at PKR 55 per kg. The government is also mulling restoration of the magistracy system that had been in force since colonial times to keep prices of essentials stable but abolished by the Musharraf regime.

Government's focus on inflations also reflects in its raising policy rates by 0.25 paisa and vowing to discourage the import of non-essential luxury items so as to bring import bill down.

By announcing massive cuts in the prices of essentials with highly inelastic demand, the government probably wants to assure the people it has abandoned the hand-off approach towards inflation. A related signal is that it is ready to deviate from the path suggested by the international lenders, the IMF and World Bank, which insist on removal of subsidies for the sake of fiscal stability.

The challenge

The Covid-19 pandemic last year led to shutdowns, affecting industries, businesses and transportation around the world, and significantly reducing oil consumption. Under these circumstances, the PTI government tried to benefit the people by lowering oil prices.

However, as oil prices began to fall, oil dealers and marketing companies unwittingly stopped buying oil from the world market and, thereby, stopped supplies for domestic consumption. The Prime Minister

ordered an inquiry. The investigation continued for more than a year and a few months ago the matter was put to rest with the imposition of fines.

Last year, there was a crisis of wheat although the country produced a bumper wheat crop. When it came to harvesting, the government immediately bought so much wheat from the international market that there was no shortage. But despite all these measures the prices of wheat shot up.

This year is likely to see a repeat of the same pattern. Wheat prices have reportedly shot up in the open market, where it is selling at PKR 2300/40 kg, PKR 200 higher than the fixed price. Of course, the effect of rising wheat prices will be on prices of flour and the prices other eatables would skyrocket eventually.

After the government recently raised petrol price by PKR 5 per litre, about five times the amount sector watchdog's proposed increase, the central power purchase agency

has sent a summary to the National Electric Power Regulatory Authority (NEPRA) proposing PKR 2.7 per unit increase in the power tariffs.

The Utility Stores, which provide essential groceries at subsidised rates, have announced to increase the prices of various items to the worry of the people already grunting under the burden of indirect taxes and, consequently, erosion of their purchasing power.

Government spokespersons are constantly telling citizens that commodity prices in Pakistan are still lower than those in other countries in the region. This assertion flies in the face of the availability of petroleum Afghanistan at 60 Pakistani rupees per litre, even though this immediate neighbour is not an oil producing country.

Erosion of legitimacy

Right before the government laid budget proposals in the Parliament, PM Khan seemed to have been convinced that it had become unthinkable to roll back the price hike and suggested the alternative course of enhancing the purchasing power of the people by increasing their income.

By saying so, he simply aired his belief in the market economy wherein the supply-demand mechanism determines the price outcomes.

Of course, the PM and his economic managers have been projecting liberal credentials of their government and their audience were definitely the international financial institutions who have conditioned their aid with curbing subsidies, bridging of

the income-expenditure gap, and weeding out corruption in public institutions.

A recent interaction of the Ministry of Power with the World Bank has revealed that the international lending institution has linked its USD 1 billion credit line for energy projects with an increase in power tariff as of 1 January 2022.

The IMF program of USD 6 billion is under suspension right now and its restoration is believed to be linked with the power tariff hike no later than January 2022, which means the government may possibly have to increase electricity charges by RS 2.5-3.0 per unit in one go — the summary to this end is right on the table with NEPRA.

Fear of political backlash

The civilian governments are ultimately answerable to the electorate as ballot box decide their fate at the end of the day. The PTI had raised the electorates' expectations while vowing in its 2018 electoral program to bring back the looted money, curb corruption, and expand the tax net while bringing relief to the lower and middle income groups. But after the passage of three years in power.

If elector result any guide to gauge the performance of the government, the results of by-elections and recently held cantonment boards' polls are enough to make the government realise that it has to take inflation seriously.

In the by-polls held early this year, the ruling party could not dent the support base of the opposition parties. In the recently

held cantonment boards' polls, voters were not favouring opposition party candidates were seen backing independents rather than PTI ticket holders, a development that has set alarm bells ringing in Islamabad.

The government has also delayed, for months, local bodies' elections, which it once advocated as an alternate to the new provinces for the delivery of public goods at the grassroots level.

As local bodies' elections are due soon and the next general election is not too far off either, the opposition camp is banking largely on the government's failures reflected in the skyrocketing prices of edibles to improve their gains.

The Finance Minister has resisted the IFIs demand to increase electricity tariff to overcome the bulging circular debt, which is said to have led to a hiatus in both the IMF programme and the World Bank assistance package for power sector reform.

Of course, the government is walking a tightrope, meeting the demands of the IFIs on the one hand and responding to the expectations of the electorate on the other. For now, it is reluctant to increase electricity tariffs and ready for interventions to bring down commodity prices for fear of political backlash.

On the other hand, it may necessity try to deflect the pressure from the IFIs through earnest assurances regarding the efforts to reduce circular debt and cut down subsidies in a bid to secure loans. However, given the political imperative elaborated above, the likelihood of Pakistan sticking to the IFI's prescriptions verbatim is small.



The Confidence Game Called Dollar-Rupee Parity

Managing currency valuation consists in managing market expectations. Has the government got what it takes to stabilise the rupee?



By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan is yet again gripped by uncertainty over the exchange rate of the Pakistani currency vis-à-vis the US dollar. Businessmen and the social media users are exchanging arguments for and against further devaluation of rupee while the speculators are busy anticipating increase in value of dollars to around 200 rupees by December 2021.

As of early September 2021, dollar-rupee exchange rate was fluctuating around 168 rupees in the inter-bank and 169 rupees in the open market. A few months ago, it was around 150 to 152 in the inter-bank and open market.

But dollar started gaining value because of sudden surge in imports and the trade deficit of Pakistan. For example, in August 2021, our monthly imports mounted to USD 6 billion, from USD 3 billion the same month a year ago.

In other words, most of importers are buying the foreign exchange from the open market and banks, consequently, value of the US dollar and other major currencies is constantly surging.

During PTI era, more or less 30 percent devaluation of rupee has shrunk our gross domestic product (GDP) by that much. In simple words, we have lost 30 percent of the GDP just because depreciation of rupee value while the burden of foreign loans also surged equally as the government printed more rupees to pay to people.

Moreover, the foreign trade data of Pakistan for the first two months of fiscal year 2021-22, shows an alarming situation which is strengthening speculation about further increase in value of dollar in weeks and months ahead.

For instance, Pakistan's trade deficit mounted to USD 7.16 billion in first two months of

FY22 as imports surged to record USD 11.74 billion level in July-August. Exports in these two months amounted to 4.58 billion dollars only, leading to an alarming trade imbalance worth USD 7.16 billion.

In simple words, the trade deficit has eliminated the impact of entire inflows of remittances for July-August 2021 and IMF loan of USD 2.8 billion, which Pakistan received on 23 August 2021.

August 2021, the second month of the current financial year, witnessed a staggering 133 percent growth in trade deficit driven largely by a doubling of imports – to USD 6.3 billion as against USD 3.32 billion in same month last year.

If the current foreign trade trend persists throughout the fiscal year 2021-22, Pakistan will be spending more or less USD 65 billion on imports against expected exports of USD 29 billion, leaving a gap of USD 36 billion.

This widening gap between imports and exports would consistently drive up the value of US dollar in the inter-bank and open market operations in 2021-22, causing more trouble for consumers, importers, and foreign investors.

The current account deficit of Pakistan expanded to USD 2.2 billion in first two months of the ongoing financial year against USD 800 million surplus during the corresponding months of previous fiscal mainly because of an unexpected and a wide gap in imports and exports.

This trend also indicates that the current account deficit, if not contained in remaining period of FY22, will settle around USD 18 to USD 20 billion.

Possible impact of Dollar demand in Afghanistan

Finance Minister Shoukat Tarin said on 9 September 2021 that Afghanistan was facing shortage of US dollars. From his statement, it becomes clear that dollars will be smuggled from Pakistan to Afghanistan, an unexpected situation that will further undermine the value of Pakistani currency in the days ahead.

The State Bank of Pakistan and the PTI government must keep these factors in mind if they want to see a moderate dollar-rupee exchange rate in the ongoing fiscal year.

Impact of devaluation as per economic theory

Economic theory tells us that the efficacy of devaluation depends on the competing effects of demand and supply side impact of the exchange rate.

On the demand side, exchange rate seemed to have a positive effect as depreciation increases competitiveness and increases exports. On the other hand, it may cause an increase in the interest rate, cost of raw materials, imported products and have a negative impact on investment and growth.

On the supply side, depreciation has negative effects as the companies operating in Pakistan make price adjustment in the backdrop of depreciation of rupee and increased cost of imported goods.

Empirical evidence suggests that there is no correct method to measure equilibrium exchange rate. Trading basket's weighted exchange rate is different from competing countries weighted exchange rate.

Another important aspect associated with devaluation is that how we use the current account deficit and capital and financial accounts together. If we believe that the rupee depreciates further in 2021 then what would be the consequences?

Some of the Pakistani products that are unable to compete in the international markets at the current exchange rate of PKR 168 would be able to benefit as each dollar would now yield more rupees and manufacturers and exporters will be able to cover their costs and make profit.

Devaluation and trajectory of exports

For instance, when the PTI came to power in August 2018, the dollar-rupee exchange rate was around 118 rupees. Today it is fluctuating around 168 to 169 rupees. In simple words, exporters are getting more rupees against each dollar while importers and consumers are paying much more than before.



It is general perception that devaluation brings additional export revenues to the country. But the past exports record shows that devaluation rarely benefits our exports sector.

For example, our exports are stuck up around USD 24 billion to USD 25 billion a year since 2013-14. The PPP government handed-over about PKR 96 exchange rate

to PML-N government in 2013 which increased dollar-rupee exchange rate to around 117-118 rupees.

During the PPP, PML-N terms and till August 2021 (PTI government since August 2018), there is not much difference in our exports despite the fact that dollar-rupee exchange rate has increased to 168 rupees

The rupee may continue to slide against dollar amid rising imports and trade deficit as the State Bank and the PTI government are indifferent to rupee value due to their deal with the IMF.

However, some of the Pakistani industries would be in a better position to make profit through import substitution as the prices of competing imported goods go up which discourage consumption of imported items.

Devaluation and remittances

Meanwhile, workers' remittances that are at present diverted to informal money changers are being sent through legal channels such as Roshan Digital Account initiated by the PTI government in Sept 2020 and other available banking channels. This is evident from increase in remittances

to USD 29.4 billion in 2020-21 as compared to USD 25 billion in 2019-2020.

Pakistanis receiving foreign currency remittances are getting more rupees in the wake of devaluation of rupee.

For instance, before the formation of PTI government, Pakistanis were receiving 117

to 118 rupees against every dollar that they were getting from their family members or friends, living abroad.

However, the devaluation during three years of PTI government has increased dollar-rupee exchange rate close to 170 rupees which means countrymen receiving foreign exchange remittances are pocketing more money.

Same is the case of exporters who are earning much more rupees during the PTI government era in comparison with PML-N and PPP eras.

Exchange rate expectations

In Pakistan, exchange rate expectations have no rational basis and people follow the bandwagon effect in the wake of discrete devaluation, foreseeing further depreciation in the near future amid growing speculations by market forces.

If the effect of devaluation on the balance of payments is either neutral or negative while the foreign exchange reserves of Pakistan are not maintained at a reasonable level (at least equal to six months imports), the bandwagon expectations occur.

In such a situation, Pakistani exporters withhold their supply of dollars to get a better rate after 90 days, the maximum time

allowed to exporters to surrender their forex earned through exports.

Meanwhile, importers tend to buy dollars well ahead of time amid anticipation of further depreciation of rupee. In such a scenario, the foreign exchange market in Pakistan would, indeed, experience shortage of dollars, leading to increase in demand and value of dollar.

Cost of raw materials and inputs

It is believed that more or less 40 percent of Pakistani exporters use imported raw materials, including fuel, LNG, etc. Thus, the cost of this 40 percent inputs increased after devaluation and their gain from depreciation of rupee would be limited.

At the same time, the prices of imported goods will rise, triggering inflation which will badly affect the deprived segments of the society. Also, the profits of foreign investors would decline, a development that will discourage them to line up more investment in Pakistan.

Former Governor State Bank Dr Ishrat Hussain wrote an article on devaluation and its pros and cons in which he pointed out that during 2002-07, the dollar traded in a narrow range of about 60 rupees and exports doubled during this time. In the following five years, the rupee depreciated

by 51 percent, but there was no corresponding increase in the value of exports.

In the earlier period, inflation relative to trading partners was quite low and fiscal deficit was under control. In the latter period, inflation reached its peak of 23 percent and fiscal deficit widened to 8 percent of GDP.

Dr Ishrat observed that the lesson to be drawn from this historical evidence is that sound fiscal and monetary policies are critical to macroeconomic stability. The need for exchange rate depreciation in that event does not arise.

To rely solely upon a blunt instrument such as exchange rate while other policies are moving in the opposite direction would prove harmful to the economy.

Markets are based on sentiments and it is essential to maintain the confidence of market players by avoiding the circumstances that form the bandwagon expectations leading to pressure on exchange rate and depletion of reserves.

In fact, the economic management involves tough policy making and every policy creates a class of winners and losers. It is up to the PTI government's economic policymakers to keep value of rupee stable without putting more burden on the consumers and importers through further depreciation.



Dealing with the Record-Breaking Trade Deficit

The government is scrambling to limit the imports bill by slapping tariff and non-tariff barriers on nonessential imports.



By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

Pakistan's need to curtail the import bill gained added urgency as Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) reported the highest ever trade deficit of USD 4.345 billion for the month of August 2021 (second highest per State Bank of Pakistan).

In August 2021 exports rose 4.4 percent month-on-month to USD 2.4 billion. A sharp uptick of 211 percent for exports to Egypt, 48 percent to Afghanistan, and 18 percent to Dubai month-on-month supplemented overall exports during the month.

As per latest data released by SBP, August 2021 current account deficit was recorded at USD 1.476 billion or 5.4 percent of GDP, reaching a level similar to June 2021 (USD 1.619 Billion). Month-on-month rise in POL imports amid robust economic activity propelled goods imports (up 11 percent month-on-month) to USD 6.0 billion whereas on a year-on-year basis, a broad based increase in imports was witnessed.

This is the second time during the past three months when the import bill has crossed the USD 6.0 billion mark.

Uncertain political situation in Afghanistan continues to keep exports to the country restricted with exports settling down to USD 57 million (below FY19 monthly average of USD 99 million) during August 2021. Moreover, exports to major destinations China and the US remained largely flat month-on-month basis and reached USD 172 million for China (up 3.6 percent) and USD 508 million (up 1.0 percent) for the US during August 2021.

Continuing momentum of IT exports

IT exports (up 14 percent month-on-month) at USD 224 million pushed total services exports (up 11 percent month-on-month) during the month whereas on an aggregate basis, IT exports continued their robust momentum and arrived at USD 420 million (up 46 percent year-on-year).

Month-on-month goods import rose to USD 608 million. A substantial uptick in POL imports (up 34 percent month-on-month) contributed to the hefty month-on-month rise in the import bill.

Among machinery, a jump in the import of textile (up 29 percent month-on-month) and office machinery (up 57 percent month-on-month) lifted the segment mainly on account of rising TERF (Temporary Economic Refinance Facility) disbursements.

Textile machinery imports have more than tripled to USD 219 million during the first two months of the current fiscal as compared to the same period last year with machinery imports posting a rise of USD 253 million (up 19 percent Year-on-year basis) during the period.

Moreover, palm oil imports rose 85 percent year-on-year to USD 282 million on the back of 38 percent year-on-year increase in international palm oil prices during August 2021. Food imports are expected to remain high. The government decision to build strategic reserves for wheat and sugar in the upcoming months to avert supply disruptions is expected to put pressure on food imports. Wheat and sugar cumulatively added USD 69 million to the import bill during August 2021.

Import bill will continue to surge

Going forward, the import bill is expected to continue to surge. Some of the major items contributing this surge would be wheat and sugar purchases to build strategic reserves; rising demand for imported machinery, raw materials, and components because of recovery in domestic activity; continuing TERF disbursements; Covid-19 vaccine imports; and elevated international commodity prices.

A dissection of Pakistan's imports during 2-month Fiscal Year 2022 reveals a 45 percent jump in food, 19 percent in machinery, 165 percent in transport and 87 percent in petroleum. It is pertinent to note that amongst machinery imports, mobile phone imports have declined 20 percent year-on-year, a dividend of smart phone assembly in Pakistan.

TERF-related machinery imports along with the commodity super cycle imports i.e., food, steel, etc., are transitory in nature where TERF machinery may likely last another 2-3 months while Pakistan may continue to take the commodity prices pressure till the time global economies start raising rates or tapering the monetary easing programs.

But to thwart that pressure, new measure have just been introduced to curb imports. Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin said the other week some quarters were suggesting that GDP was heading beyond 5 percent growth, adding, "We want to control it. We don't want to jump to 6-7 percent growth quickly that could be problematic and unsustainable".

Talking about currency devaluation, the Finance Minister said the pressures built up owing to higher imports as oil and LNG prices increased significantly in six months, automobile imports, dollar outflows to Afghanistan instead of inflows in the past and perceptions that speculators and importers also exploited.

However, the real effective exchange rate (REER) was almost close to market rate with about PKR 2 per dollar difference.

The two-month exports were equal to 17 percent of the annual target of USD 26.3

billion. But the Ministry of Commerce has projected annual exports at USD 31 billion.

A windfall inflow from exports will be USD 664 million in proceeds from the sale of twelve JF17 Thunder fighter jets to Argentina. This could help alleviate pressure on the trade deficit amid a period of elevated imports.

Prime Minister Imran Khan asked his economic team to check the increase in the import of non-essential goods, including that of vehicles, as his government might face a challenge of an unmanageable current account deficit because of a projected USD 70 billion imports this fiscal year.

Growing imports would either increase the external borrowing requirements or dent the official foreign exchange reserves, as the exports are not matching the pace of imports. The foreign remittances – another

important source of debt-free access to forex, is likely to increase in single digits, as per the central bank projections.

The sources said options to curb imports include imposing new tariff and non-tariff barriers. The trade deficit started widening the moment the government decided to let the economy grow after keeping it under check for two and half years.

Pakistan has been running a consistent trade deficit since 2003 mainly due to high imports of energy. Since 2012, China has emerged as Pakistan's largest trading partner replacing the United States. In recent years, the biggest trade deficits were recorded with China, India, United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Malaysia. Pakistan records trade surpluses with the United States, Afghanistan, Germany and United Kingdom.

Chart 3: POL imports rise 34% M/M to USD 1.4 BN in Aug-21

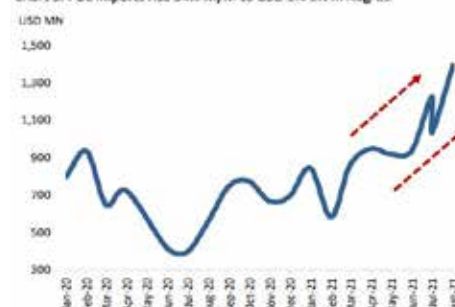


Chart 4: 58% of the M/M increase in goods import came from POL

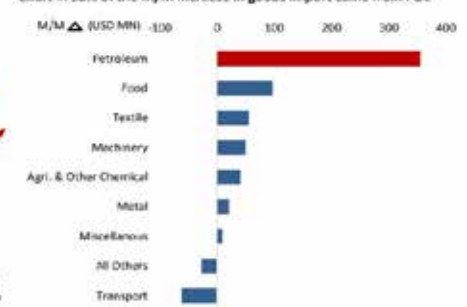


Chart 5: Building buffers - food imports up 16% M/M to USD 690 MN

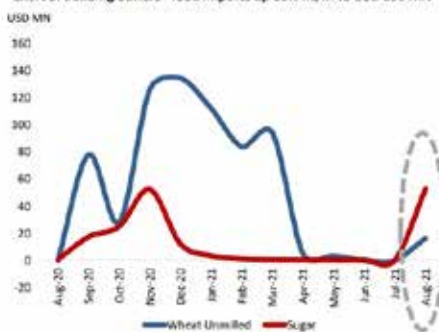


Chart 6: Third highest food imports recorded in Aug-21



Chart 9: "Others" category (+15% M/M) – a significant segment now

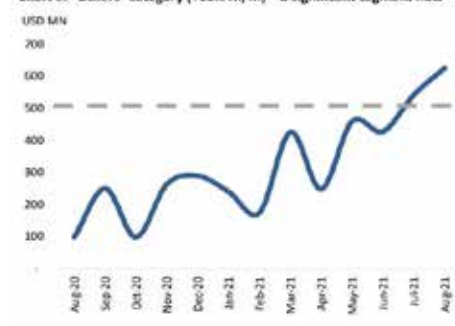
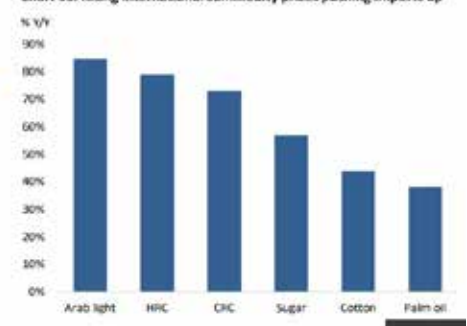


Chart 10: Rising international commodity prices pushing imports up



Why Karachi Ranks Among the World's Least Safe Cities

Pakistan's southern megapolis is hostage to the three scourges of neglect, incompetence, and corruption.



TTI Report

To the utter mortification of most Pakistanis, our seaside megapolis has ranked 59 on the Economist Intelligence Unit's Safe Cities Index, featuring 60 international destinations. The only city ranked below Karachi on the index is Myanmar's Yangon.

This is a worsening from the last edition of the prestigious biennial index published in 2019, when Karachi, Pakistan's largest city and Sindh's provincial capital, weighed in at 57.

Karachi scores poorly on all five sub-indices or pillars of the SCI: Digital security (57/60), health security (55/60), infrastructure security (57/60), personal security (60/60), and the newly added environmental security (57/60). Altogether, these five pillars take stock of 76 indicators related to different aspects of urban safety.

Civil society circles blame Karachi's poor showing on neglect, incompetence, and corruption in the city and provincial governments of Karachi.

They say Karachi's infrastructure has deteriorated, law and order situation has

worsened, and public healthcare has gone downhill in recent years because of the utter negligence and incompetence of the two governments responsible for the affairs of the country's financial hub.

"The degradation is a reflection of the deteriorating situation of health in Karachi," an Arab News report quoted Dr. Qaisar Sajjad, secretary general of the Pakistan Medical Association, as saying. "We don't see any steps which may make us see any better conditions in the future."

Dr. Sajjad noted government-run hospitals in Karachi used to offer free treatment and would provide immediate healthcare, especially in case of emergencies, which is not longer the case.

"The sewerage system is fragile, pure drinking water is unavailable and there is abundance of mosquitos due to which health care facilities receive more patients of mosquito-borne diseases", he was quoted as saying.

Health and climate conditions had deteriorated with the passage of time, according to Sajjad, and the price of medical treatment

had shot up manifolds in both public and private sector hospitals of the city.

Karachi-based political commentator and analyst Mazhar Abbas lamented, "No serious efforts have been made for the security of the city". He noted how Pakistan's most populous city had only spent a puny PKR 600 million (USD 3.57 million) on the safe city project, compared with Islamabad's USD 124 million and Lahore's USD 157 million.

Abbas further noted Karachi was witnessing a surge in crimes, and noted how urban poverty had soared with slums mushrooming to over 8,000 shanty towns in the city from just a few in the 1980s.

According to CNN, while Asian cities like Tokyo, Singapore and Osaka have continuously occupied the top spots year after year, Copenhagen has been named the world's safest city for the first time, scoring 82.4 points out of 100 in the annual report.

Denmark's capital jumped from joint eighth place in 2019 to the top of the list, largely thanks to the introduction of an environmental security section, which the city

scored particularly well in, along with personal security.

"One key factor that makes Copenhagen such a safe city is its low crime rate, currently at its lowest level in more than a decade," Lars Weiss, lord mayor of Copenhagen, says in the report.

"Copenhagen is also characterized by great social cohesion and a relatively narrow wealth gap. It is a mixed city where both the cleaning assistant and the CEO meet each other at the local supermarket and have their kids in the same school.

"This is one of the very cornerstones of Danish culture, and it contributes greatly to the high levels of trust and safety that we benefit from."

Canada's Toronto just missed out on the top spot, taking second place with 82.2 points, while Singapore was third with 80.7 points.

Although Sydney came fourth, with 80.1 points, the Australian city topped the digital security category, while 2019 winner Tokyo was awarded 80.0 points, putting the Japanese city in fifth place.

Unsurprisingly, Covid-19 is constantly mentioned throughout the report, particularly in the assessments on health security, which Copenhagen scored much lower in than other categories.

According to Nima Asgari, director of the Asia Pacific Observatory on Health Systems and Policies, the subject of urban resilience has previously been focused on disasters and floods rather than health crises, "probably because people never thought the health system would collapse as a consequence of continuous demand from outbreaks."

The report suggests that this missing link may have led to some destinations being less prepared, and ultimately less successful in limiting the impact of coronavirus.

"Covid-19 teaches that there is always a blind spot, even when there is a lot of activity," adds Michele Acuto, a professor of global urban politics at the University of Melbourne.

The report goes on to stress that the understanding of health security "needs to be revisited" as a direct result of coronavirus.



The Taming (or Not) of the Church

The journey of Christianity from late medieval period to the present day.

By Azmat M Saqib

Middle Ages Christian Europe: From Turbulence to Enlightenment

Under the dark shadows of Hundred Years' war (1337 – 1453AD), dawn of Renaissance was unfolding in Italy during the fourteenth century Europe. Renaissance ushered in cultural and scientific awakening. It brought an emphasis on science and scientific proof instead of relying on what religious authorities said.

In the field of religious thought and experience, the Renaissance opened the gates to a new religious world through the Protestant Reformation. It weakened the idea that Church was the only source of religious knowledge. The Reformation helped the Scientific Revolution because it placed less emphasis on the supernatural, and greater emphasis on knowledge. Reformation and Renaissance were moving forward in a whirlwind which in many ways created chaos among Commoners.

Reformation was a phenomena which occurred in Western Europe, essentially a Protestant revolt of North against Catholic South. Martin Luther (1483 – 1546 AD), a German professor of theology and religious reformer was the catalyst of the 16th century Protestant Reformation movement. Disgruntled by the clergies' lavish living and corruption in contrast to the simplicity of Christ, he saw through what Bible said and the Church practices of the time. Luther through Gospel preached forgiveness which can be earned by faith alone. He introduced two major changes: One, salvation is a gift of God and an act of faith which can't be earned, and second, Bible is the only source of religious authority. Luther rejected the seven sacraments, and kept only the Holy Communion and Baptism.

Catholics venerate saints and Virgin Mary and confess their sins to a priest. They accept precedence established through centuries by the Church and follow the Pope in Rome as final authority. They maintain a time honored element of elaborate rituals and mysticism that enriches their religious experience. For Protestants, worship style became different and purged their Churches of holy relics and rituals and reduced the former role of ordained clergy. Rather than going through Saints, Mary and ordained clergy, Reformist access God through Bible study and personal prayers.

Under the influence of Reformation, protests were launched against Simony, i.e., holding of multiple church offices by one person, episcopal vacancies, and the sale of indulgences. Protestants attacked Catholic churches and removed symbols (according to them idolatry) from churches. Monks and nuns left churches and got married, even Martin Luther lived a worldly life, got married and had children. In 1521, at the



Diet (assembly) of Worms, Germany, Martin Luther was given a hearing by the Catholic Papacy in the presence of Emperor of Rome but was convicted for heresy. The more the Catholic Rome suppressed Martin Luther, the more he became defiant. His mass publications utilizing newly invented printing press proliferated among the Germans. Martin Luther translated the Bible into German and it reached common man and literacy sky rocketed.

Catholic Church responded by counter-reformation movement; by heresy trials, the exiling of protestant population from Catholic lands, the seizure of children from protestant parents for institutionalized catholic upbringing, the listing of prohibited books, Spanish inquisition and a series of wars. All protestant doctrinal objections and changes were uncompromisingly rejected by the Pope.

War of ideas turned into real wars, smaller kings broke away from Roman Emperor's tutelage. Power, money and land grabbing by smaller kings fanned the 100 Years religious wars. Peasants revolted against their lords. In Germany, especially, breaking away from Rome made them independent of Bishops and priests who were above secular laws. Financial offerings to Rome could now be stopped. Protestant conversions made them richer since the church land (biggest land owners of Europe) could then be confiscated.

Lutheran protests had unleashed a free for all wars by princes and kings jockeying for more power. These wars were mainly in German regions lasting from 1518 to 1548. Even the most powerful Roman army defending Catholicism was exhausted by these wars. They all signed a peace treaty in 1548 thence every ruler was free to choose whether he wants to adopt Catholicism or Protestantism. Europe was divided into Protestant North and Catholic South.

John Calvin in Geneva also preached reforms. Presbyterianism spread to France and Netherlands and beyond. King of Sweden, Gustav and King Henry the VIII of England also broke away from Rome. Newly established Church of England crushed Catholic Revolt. Scotland

adopted Calvinism and professed everyone can read Bible. Jesuit of Spain remained Catholic battling corruption inside the Church and heresy outside. In Switzerland and Holland, reformed churches were made simple inside by removing statues and other religious symbols and pulpits became prominent in bringing the word of God directly to people. In protestant majority Northern Europe, Catholics went into low profile.

After Martin Luther's death in 1546, reformation had brought fundamental changes in Western society. With the weakening of church influence, secular forces and science in Europe flourished lasting till 20th century. Literacy across Europe spread freely. Capitalism thrived in Northern Europe fumed by protestant work ethics.

During late Renaissance period, religious division of Europe had Catholics, Lutheran, Calvinists, Anglican, Bohemian and Moravian Brethren, Anabaptists, Eastern Orthodox and Islamists, all living in close vicinity in Europe.

Simultaneous to the counter-reformation, the Catholic Reformation resulted in improvements in art and culture, anti-corruption measures, founding of Jesuits, establishment of seminaries, a reassertion of traditional doctrines and the emergence of new religious orders aimed at both moral reform and new missionary activity. Spanish mysticism and French school of spirituality prevailed in South Western Europe. Saint Pius V encouraged disbursement of alms to the poor, charity, building hospitals, consoling the poor and sick and supporting missionaries became the humane face of Catholic reformation.

Age of Discovery gave fresh opportunities for Catholic missions in the Americas and colonies in Africa and Asia, infused a new life to the spread of Christianity among the heathens.

In 1633, trial of Galileo is considered a defining moment in the history of relationship between Church and Science in Europe. Galileo supported Copernican Heliocentric Theory of Universe, which proposed that Earth and other planets revolve around the Sun, a sacrilege to Church beliefs of the time. Galileo agreed to plead guilty to a lesser charge in exchange for a more lenient sentence. He was sentenced to prison and remained under house arrest till his death in 1642. His explanations resulted in controversies over theology, astronomy and philosophy and was banned to spread his theories.

Protestants' colonization in the New World was heralded by English Puritans. Considering themselves as pilgrims, left England to escape religious persecution and sailed out to the New World hoping for a Puritan Utopia. The Puritans believed that God had formed a unique covenant with them, that God expected them to live according to the Scriptures, to reform the Anglican Church, and to set a good example that would cause those who had remained in England to change their sinful ways.

Revivalism refers to Calvinist and Wesleyan revival called the great Awakening in North America during the late modern period (1750-1945). Calvinism is a major branch of Protestantism, a practice set down by John Calvin emphasizing the sovereignty of God and the authority of the Bible.

The first great awakening was a wave of religious enthusiasm among Protestants in the American colonies (1730-1740). The second great awakening (1800-1830s), unlike the first, focused on the unchurched and sought in them a deep sense of personal salvation as experienced in revival meetings. The third great awakening began from 1857 and was most notable for taking the movement throughout the world, especially English speaking countries.

Other significant developments include Restoration which refers to the belief that a purer form of Christianity should be restored using early Church as a model. They believed that Christianity had deviated from the true, original Christianity. Jehovah's Witness movement founded by Charles Russell & Latter Day Saint movement (also known as Mormons) believed that Joseph Smith was chosen to restore the original organization established by Jesus.



In the Russian Empire, the Russian Orthodox Church held a privileged position, although the Church reform of Peter I in the early 18th Century had placed the Orthodox authority under the control of the tsar. The Bolsheviks and other Russian revolutionaries saw the Church as an enemy of the people. Criticism of atheism was strictly forbidden and sometimes led to imprisonment.

Liberal Christianity is an umbrella term covering diverse, philosophically informed religious movements and moods within late 18th, 19th and 20th century Christianity. Fundamentalist Christianity was a movement that arose mainly within Britain and American Protestantism in the late 19th and early 20th century in reaction to modernism and certain liberal Protestant groups that denied doctrines considered fundamental to Christianity.

Among the contemporary Christianity, the 21st ecumenical council of the Catholic Church allowed that mass may be celebrated in the vernacular as well as in Latin. Ecumenism broadly refers to movements between Christian groups to establish a degree of unity through dialogue. Christian fundamentalism developed into a movement to reject the radical influences of philosophical humanism. Especially targeting critical approaches to the interpretation of the Bible, as well as blocking in roads into the Church by atheistic scientific assumptions. More moderate among this group are called Evangelical. This sums up the history of Christianity till the present times. Ends

Several Cities Approaching Herd Immunity

The fourth wave of Covid-19 is waning but the risk of a renewed outbreak remains

By Noor Aftab

Pakistan is witnessing a decline in the coronavirus cases and the fourth wave of the pandemic to hit the country is believed to be waning, but medical experts warn against dropping the guard just yet because there is no reason to believe Novel Coronavirus has been beaten back.

The war is far from over because the virus is around for now and continues to pose the risk of a renewed outbreak whenever the conditions are right for its spread, they say. Any irresponsible attitude at either the government or the public level may push the country into the troubled waters again as Strict adherence to the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) and responsible behaviour are therefore our only means to keep the deadly disease at bay.

Hospitals are through the worst and workloads of doctors and paramedics have returned to manageable proportions. The availability of coronavirus vaccine is not a problem anymore except for few cases where logistical glitches have caused problems.

Ratio of vaccinated population in several cities including Islamabad is nearing levels considered requisite to attain herd immunity.

Islamabad has become the first city in Pakistan to have half its eligible population (15 years and older) fully vaccinated. Around 71 percent of Islamabad's eligible population has received at least one dose of coronavirus vaccine.

Current situation

The overall positivity ratio was recorded 4.1 percent as we go to the press, and the national tally of active Covid-19 cases stands at 62,922, some 4,846 of which are critical.

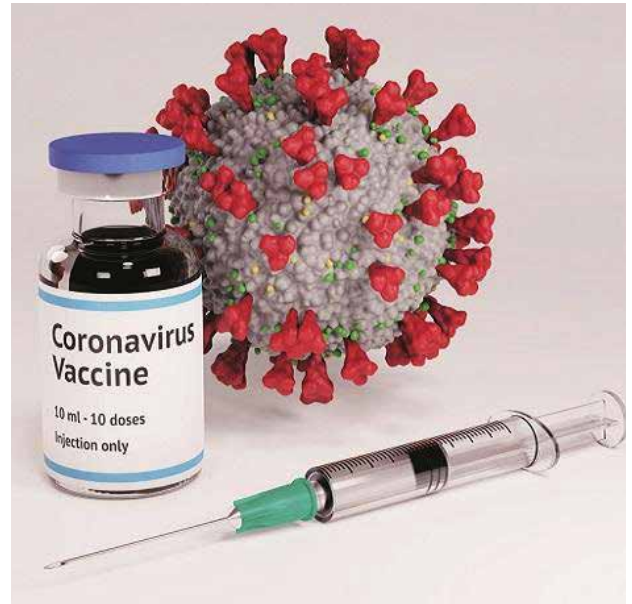
Around 1,137,656 people have recovered so far across Pakistan, making for a recovery rate of over 90 percent. Of the fatalities, 12,449 occurred in Punjab; 7,289 in Sindh; 5,426 in KP; 904 in ICT; 344 in Balochistan; 182 in GB; and 733 in Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK).

A total of 18,950,039 tests have been conducted so far, while 640 hospitals are equipped with Covid-19 facilities across the country. Ventilator occupancy is high in four cities, viz., Multan (86 percent), Lahore (64 percent), Sargodha (60 percent), and Bahawalpur (40 percent).

Around 545 ventilators are occupied elsewhere in the country, while no Covid-19 affected person is on ventilator in Balochistan and GB. About 68 percent beds allocated for Covid-19 patients are occupied in Swabi; 57 percent in Bannu; 60 percent in Sargodha; 49 percent in Peshawar; 50 percent in Multan; and 46 percent in Nowshera.

Vaccination

Pakistan has so far administered at least 76,141,484 doses of Covid-19 vaccines. Assuming every person needs 2 doses,



that's enough to have vaccinated about 17.6 percent of the country's population.

On average, Pakistan administered about 767,771 doses of Covid-19 vaccine every day last week. At that pace, it will take a further 57 days to administer enough doses for another 10 percent of the population. Around 56,229,457 people have received first dose of coronavirus vaccine while 25,493,964 people are now 'fully vaccinated'.

Off the red list

The United Kingdom decided to take Pakistan off its red list for international travel after five months. From 4 October, if any Pakistani is fully vaccinated they will not need a pre-departure test before arrival into England from a non-red country and from later in October, will be able to replace the day two PCR test with a cheaper lateral flow test.

Reacting to the development, Minister for Planning, Development and Special Initiatives, Asad Umar, said: "Good to know finally the right decision has been taken to take Pakistan off red list."

New measures

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) has warned that basic services would not be available to the unvaccinated people from 1 October. The unvaccinated people will not be eligible to enter shopping malls, use public transport or to travel by air after the 30 September deadline.

In educational institutions, staff members who have not been fully vaccinated will not be allowed to continue working. The Centre took to twitter to announce the warning as part of its Obligatory Vaccination regime to ensure maximum complete inoculation of the eligible population.

The forum wrote, “Warning! From October 1, all facilities used in daily life will be closed to all people who have not been vaccinated. We emphasize the general public to get their vaccination done as soon as possible and keep life going. The Centre also decided to lift additional non-pharmaceutical interventions (NPIs) in six districts due to gradual decline in disease prevalence including Lahore, Faisalabad, Multan, Sargodha, Gujarat and Bannu.”

Shocking revelations

A sting operation recently carried out by BBC showed that any person who got himself registered at the counters set up at the vaccination centres could go out without being vaccinated.

Because once a person gets registered at the counter he is recorded as vaccinated. Official record being maintained by National Database and Registration Authority (Nadra) would show they have received the dose.

Shown the video of the sting operation, Asad Umer, the head of NCOC, was said to be surprised.

Reports of online sale of fake vaccination certificates also emerged. The NCOC directed the Federal Investigation Agency (FIA) to take action against those involved in providing fake vaccination certificates to the people. The FIA enhanced its investigation circle and started crackdown against such people.

But now a new report has raised many questions about the vaccination process. This report made startling revelation that somebody used the CNIC number of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to register for vaccination at Lahore.

The official record uploaded by DHO Naveed Altaf therefore shows that Nawaz Sharif received first dose of Sinopharm vaccine at Kot Khawaja Saeed Vaccination Centre despite the fact that he has been in London since November 2019.

Dire consequences

Now many in Pakistan fears the reports about issuance of vaccination certificate in the name of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif can cause serious trouble for Pakistan at the international level.

When the United Kingdom put Pakistan into its Red List, it was on the grounds that the Pakistani government was not properly sharing record related to the coronavirus disease. If the United Kingdom and other European countries start giving serious thought to the allegedly flawed vaccination registration and certification process, Pakistan can face consequences that can also be disastrous for those Pakistanis who travel to other countries.

It is up to the government to clean up the vaccination process and paperwork around it to convince the world that the vaccination certificates being issued by the Nadra are authentic and dependable. If it does not happen, vaccination certificates issued by the Pakistan government may lose validity in the eyes of the world.

This is a serious issue that needs attention of the government to avoid any untoward situation at the international level.

Bad role models

Majority of politicians have failed to become role model for the people in the days of coronavirus pandemic. Political parties regularly share footages of their party meetings but unfortunately, the participants are often seen without facemasks and violating social distancing guidelines.

The scenes from the Parliament House also show that most of the elected members never wear facemasks during the sessions. Many social activists have already raised this question if the elected members never follow the SOPs then how can the government ask the common people to do so or take action against those who refuse to show compliance with these directives.

The role of religious parties is also not up to the mark when it comes to sensitise the public about the importance of the SOPs. One of the religious leaders still talks irresponsibly about the coronavirus pandemic that gives wrong message to the people.

Report SOPs violation

The NCOC has urged the people that if they come across any violation of Covid-19 SOPs like people not wearing facemasks, non-adherence to social distancing, over-crowding at public places then they should take a picture and brief account of violation and send it to 03353336262 (0335333NCOC).



Conclusion

It is good to see that the number of coronavirus cases is decreasing in Pakistan and the government is also hoping that the situation will further improve in the coming weeks. But at the same time the health experts have warned that there is no final word as to how and when the pandemic will end.

This means the people of all age groups should take extreme care to stay safe from coronavirus infection. We cannot end the coronavirus disease, but we can certainly protect ourselves by following SOPs.

This is No Cricket

Pakistan is still seething with anger over how New Zealand and England abandoned their Pakistan tours.

Desk Report

To say Pakistanis are angry and heartbroken would be an understatement. The nasty one-two punch has left the majority of this nation of cricket lovers in a daze of fury that no amount of venting has been able to cool.

First, NZC called off their tour of Pakistan in midstride on the morning of the first One Day International of the itinerary, citing an unspecified security alert issued by the New Zealand government. Cricket fans across Pakistan were stunned by this hugely disappointing turn of events.

The Kiwis were scheduled to play three ODI and five Twenty20 International (T20I) matches in what would be their first tour of Pakistan since 2003.

Three days later came the second heartbreaking news: The ECB had abandoned the simultaneous Pakistan tours of their men's and women's teams citing "concerns about travelling to the region".

The English men's squad were to play two T20Is on 13 and 14 October while the women's side would play two T20Is and three ODIs.

Pakistan remained without international cricket for almost eight years in the wake of the 2009 terrorist attack on the Sri Lanka national cricket team. The drought finally ended with the West Indies tour of Pakistan in April 2017.

The intervening years were marked with Pakistani security forces hunting down and decimating terrorists in their hideouts to make Pakistan safe; and Pakistani diplomats and cricket officials employing all kinds of lobbying and suasion with cricketing nations to play in Pakistan.

Since 2017, Pakistan has welcomed numerous teams. On each occasion, the authorities have been able to ensure water-tight security and the fans have turned out in large numbers (except when prevented by Covid-19-related shutdowns) to make the visitors feel welcome.

Small wonder, then, that the large majority of Pakistanis felt hugely disappointed over an unspecified security threat, disregarding assurances of security from top Pakistani authorities including Prime Minister Imran Khan himself.

The Chief Executive of the Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB), Wasim Khan, held a press conference responding to the New Zealand tour cancellation ahead of England announcement to pull out of their tour.

"We know what the guidance is, we know from a security perspective there's a clean bill of health. We certainly hope England tour", said Khan in his virtual presser. "We certainly believe they should be coming and hope they will be coming, based on what the competent authority in Islamabad and the security expert is saying."



"The same security expert who provided the guidance for the ECB to go to Bangladesh, six weeks after the bomb blast that killed 12 people [in 2016] - so there's a lot of trust put into this security expert who is understood and respected around the world. We certainly hope when the board meets, the ECB will decide to send their team to Pakistan for this short tour."

That, however, was not to be.

Many in Pakistan think there is more to the affair than meets the eye. Two cabinet ministers held a presser in Islamabad last week, claiming the NZC decision to back out of the tour was prompted by a hoax security threat emanating from India.

"Fake news was generated by India to scuttle the tour," Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry told reporters. "The threatening email was generated from a secure service Proton mail and Pakistan has requested Interpol for assistance in further probe," said Chaudhry, flanked by Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid.

"The ICC [International Cricket Council] must take notice of these nefarious and malicious acts of Indian nationals, otherwise it will adversely impact the 'Gentleman's Game' for many years to come," he added.

There was some speculation that the twin rebuffs had something to do with adverse security assessments for Pakistan in the wake of the Taliban's rise in Afghanistan. Sheikh Rasheed Ahmed, however, took to Twitter to point out that the US, NATO, IMF, and World Bank had all considered Pakistan safe when evacuating their diplomatic and allied staff from Afghanistan.

West Indian superstar Chris Gale won hearts all over Pakistan when he tweeted in the immediate wake of the NZC rebuff: "I'm going to Pakistan tomorrow, who coming with me?" One of the best batters on the West Indies side, the left-handed powerhouse is never afraid to speak his heart and is known for his outspoken views.



Former WI skipper Darren Sammy wasted no time expressing his own disappointment over the development.

“Disappointed waking up to the news of the cancellation of the Pakistan Vs New Zealand series because of security issues” Tweeted Sammy, associated with Pakistan Super League (PSL) team Peshawar Zalmis. “Over the last 6 years playing and visiting Pakistan has been one of the most enjoyable experiences. I’ve always felt safe. This is a massive blow to Pakistan”.

Former cricket great and today’s notable international cricket commentator Ian Chappell was sympathetic to the Pakistani point of view when he said in his column for ESPNcricinfo: “[T]he treatment meted out to Pakistan ... appears to be excessively harsh, considering the way they have unselfishly toured other countries during the pandemic.”

Another international cricket commentator Mike Haysman seemed to concur when he said the New Zealand and England cricket boards’ cancellation of the Pakistan tour was “extremely disappointing”.

Noting that Pakistan had kept their England tour on track when the coronavirus pandemic was at its peak, he told Pakistan’s GEO News, “ECB had a golden opportunity to pay back Pakistani cricket with a four-day tour which they have unfortunately missed”.

Is currently in Pakistan to commentate for National T20 Cup going on in Rawalpindi, Haysman stressed the NZC should have taken up the security threats with the authorities in Pakistan instead of unilaterally calling off the tour.

“When you play international cricket, you have to provide evidence backing your decisions before cancelling the tour,” said Haysman, adding he has been travelling in and out of Pakistan since 1996 and has “never found any problem regarding security”.

Noting security in Pakistan is a bit more than usual with a reason to conduct international cricket smoothly, Haysman said his presence in Pakistan was evidence enough he perceived no security threats.

There are those in Pakistan who think the cancelled tours should have implications for Pakistan’s diplomatic relations with New Zealand and England.

“The mental and physical well-being of our players and support staff remains our highest priority and this is even more critical given the times we are currently living in”, the ECB statement announcing tour cancellation said.

“We know there are increasing concerns about travelling to the

region and believe that going ahead will add further pressure to a playing group who have already coped with a long period of operating in restricted Covid environments”.

On their part, the English cricketers have said that the English players union was not consulted ahead of the ECB decision to abandon the Pakistan tour.

The TEPP (Team England Player Partnership) strongly denied and told that at no point TEPP told ECB that players won’t be touring Pakistan. ECB was solely behind this decision and this decision could affect the relations between both countries.

The newly PCB Chairman Ramiz Raja was livid as he expressed his anger and disgust when England refused to tour Pakistan. Pakistan tour England not once but twice amid the Covid-19 pandemic, and now when it is England’s turn to repay, they have backed off.

Raja said that action will be taken and the matter will be taken up with the ICC. Now all of us will get to know how fair ICC is with Pakistan.

He also vowed to exact revenge on NZ and England on the playfield, urging his players, “Release your frustration and anger by channelling it towards your performance. Take out your frustration in the coming World Cup by performing well”.

The Cricket West Indies assured the Pakistan Cricket Board that it plans to honour its tour commitment in December this year. CWI CEO Johnny Grave said the governing body of the game in the Caribbean has no intention of not fulfilling the tour obligations.

Meanwhile, West Indies have assured Pakistan their tour of the South Asian cricketing superpower is on track.

“Our intention is to fulfil our tour obligations,” Cricket West Indies CEO Johnny Grave told Trinidad News Day. “We have a very clear process that we go through with independent security experts, as we did in 2018.”

The West Indies, led by Jason Mohammed, visited Pakistan three years ago to play three T20 matches in Karachi. They are now scheduled to tour of Pakistan in December 2021 to play three ODIs and three T20s.

Some Pakistani media reports are keeping the hopes of the England tour alive, citing high-level diplomatic contacts being undertaken by Pakistani authorities to that end. However, whether or not the England tour of Pakistan materializes, the episode will forever be seen as a huge betrayal and a national insult in Pakistan.

Elite Lahore Radio Units Shut Down Due to Financial Woes

Why can't power consumers – who pay PKR 35 per month for PTV – pay another PKR 5 to save PBC?

By Muhammad Zahid Rifat

Two classical music related units at Radio Pakistan Lahore have been close down due to acute shortage of trained, professional and experienced manpower and financial problems and crisis.

Apparently, the Classical Music Research Cell has been shut down temporarily due to a lack of professional and experienced manpower interested in conducting research in classical music while the Central Production Unit has since been merged with the Broadcasting House itself thus ending its independent status and as such it is non-existent for months together though the building is still there.

The Classical Music Research Cell was founded by the late Mr Faiz Ahmed Faiz in June 1974 when the prominent poet, journalist and intellectual was working as Consultant for Cultural Affairs, Federal Ministry of Education. It was initially established in a rented bungalow in Gulberg Lahore and shifted to the basement of Radio Pakistan Lahore in 1978.

A three year performance report of the Cell was prepared in June 1977 and its one page preface was written by Mr Faiz himself, signed 1 July 1977.

The preface to the performance report makes interesting reading and is partly being reproduced here for the information of the readers particularly those interested in classical music directly and indirectly.

“The Cell was intended to conduct and to sponsor research in all branches of classical music and to arrange publication of research material, to re-appraise, by research and investigation, the contribution made by Muslim musicians, both by individuals as well as by schools or gharanas, to the development of classical music, vocal and instrumental, to collect all types of printed material on music i.e., books, manuscripts, articles, magazines etc. with a view to set up a reference library, to obtain photographs or portraits of eminent musicians together with their biographical data, to establish a sound library of magnetic tapes, cassettes, gramophone discs etc. of famous Muslim musicians.”

“The other objectives visualized for the Cell included collection of musical instruments of Muslim origin from foreign Muslim countries to prepare gramophone discs, tapes and cassettes for the popularization of classical music and to educate public taste in the appreciation. (Under the scheme a set of 20 LP records of seven famous Muslim Gharanas viz., Agra, Delhi, Gwalior, Kirana, Patiala, Sham Chaurasi and Talwandi, sung by their renowned representatives in their own characteristic style has already been prepared will be available for sale soon.)”

“The Cell began to operate with these very large objectives but with practically no funds and with a one man staff. The



same question continued for nearly two years when a small grant was made available for the Cell by the Federal Ministry of Education. Nevertheless, as the pages of the progress report will show, it has succeeded in amassing a fair body of research material of considerable value despite these seemingly prohibitive handicaps. This was made possible through the generosity of private donors whose names appear in the report, a small grant from the Ford Foundation, and above all the resources, fullness and dedicated efforts of its one man establishment namely Mr M.A. Shaikh who was assisted in his difficult task by various institutions e.g., Pakistan National Council of the Arts, EMI (Pakistan), Pakistan Television Corporation, United States Information Service Lahore, Goethe Institute (Pak-German Cultural Centre) Lahore, Iran Cultural Centre, Lahore and a large number of eminent musicians and music lovers.”

“This report bears ample testimony to the fruits of these labours. The Cell can already boast of a reference library of over 400 rare book, manuscripts, micro-films, and a large collection of journals, magazines and learned articles which are available to all students of music. It has also managed to collect well over a hundred photographs and portraits of eminent musicians, past and present, together with their detailed biographical data categorized according to various schools and various periods of musical tradition. Copies of these photographs are made available to interested parties. It has also setup a free service in a small recording studio for recordings of this large library of music records, tapes and cassettes including music from 48 foreign countries that all music lovers can avail of.”

Little did Mr Faiz realize or anticipate that the democratically elected government of Prime Minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto was to be overthrown by the then Army Chief General Zia ul Haq four days later on 5 July 1977. However, the Cell appears to be one of the institutions that survived the onslaught of the martial law.

The report covers the initial three years period of the Cell, which went on to score an array of achievements in the

following years after it was moved to a basement at Lahore Radio Station building. For want of space, the achievements are being briefly mentioned here.

Until recently, the Cell had collected articles, books, research papers and manuscripts in English, Urdu, Persian and Hindi languages. It had amassed a collection of more than one thousand titles for the benefit of music lovers and researchers. Copies of some rare and ancient manuscripts were provided by the India Office Library.

The Cell has many achievements to its credit including publication of rare books which may be mentioned some other time.

A large part of the credit for the Cell's outstanding performance must be given to the steadfast devotion and dedication of Mr M.A. Shaikh. He was working on contract which was extended on annual basis by Radio Pakistan administration. Around 15 years ago, he developed differences with Radio Pakistan bosses, left the job, and moved to London where he died after some time.

Radio Pakistan authorities continued to run the Cell, posting people from among the existing staff or from outside as well on contract basis as regular employees were fast attaining retiring age and not all senior employees had an interest in classical music whatsoever.

The problem aggravated greatly when on 27 January 2011, the Supreme Court of Pakistan banned with immediate effect re-employment of retired employees and hiring of services of desired persons from outside on contract or daily wages basis.

In view of this ban, Radio Station ran short of manpower which could be entrusted with the important task of managing the Cell and as such was left with no option but to close down the Classical Music Research Cell a couple of months back after 47 years of its being established.

Thanks to the exertions of the Cell, a surprisingly vast treasure of classical music lies buried in the Classical Music Research Cell located in an underground chamber of Radio Pakistan Lahore.

Unfortunately, however, music lovers and researchers do not seem to be either aware of its existence or making much of it. Huge genealogical charts of the various gharanas adorn the stairwell down the basement, which are covered by dust and hardly readable.

In view of persisting shortage of interested, classical music minded professionals facing Radio Pakistan, will this vast treasure be safeguarded and preserved for the posterity, please?

As for the Central Production Unit, it was established in around 1970s when the erstwhile Radio Pakistan was transformed in a corporate body as Pakistan Broadcasting Corporation. The Unit was established as an independent entity although situated within the compound of Radio Station Lahore.

A new single storey building was constructed in the open space at the back of main building of Lahore Radio Station mainly for production of quality dramas, features and music. It had three studios and an orchestra whose members were paid special salaries comparable with the pay scale of senior producer of Radio Pakistan.

Last year, the Central Production Unit was merged with main Broadcasting House owing to acute financial problems. All the classical singers and musicians associated with it had retired over the years one after the other with the exception of one tabla player and one violinist, who were transferred to Broadcasting House Lahore but have also retired by now.

With the passage of time, as the producers were posted from BH Lahore, the Central Production Unit lost its main objective of producing quality dramas and features and was only confined to classical music by the producers who were more inclined to music and themselves also had singing talent.

The premises is lying vacant now and may be rented or leased out to a federal government entity sooner or later, according to some reports.



Financial problems and difficulties facing by Radio Pakistan Lahore, the second oldest in the country after Peshawar Radio Station, can well be judged by the bitter fact that telephone connection to it was disconnected about an year ago on account of huge outstanding bills. These telephone lines have not yet been restored by paying long overdue payment and the producers and other officials have to rely on their cell phones for performing their professional and official duties.

Radio Pakistan has no source of income of its own. Proceeds from commercial advertisements are not much as the advertisers are more interested in their commercials on TV channels both in the public and private sectors. As such, Radio Pakistan has to rely for all expenses on the federal government from where it gets no prompt and quick response to its heavy demands.

Domestic electricity consumers for months and months together are paying PKR 35 per month as TV Fee along with their bills. But nobody up and down in the federal government or the parliament as such seems to be mulling over possibility of adding just PKR 5 and making it TV & Radio Fee PK 40 in the electricity bills.

Even this small amount of PKR 5 will generate substantial money for resource-starved Radio Pakistan every month and reducing financial liabilities of the federal government vis-à-vis Radio Pakistan. Will someone in the corridors of powers give this suggestion a thought to relieve PBC from chronic financial woes to some extent?

Pakistani Short Garneres Global Acclaim

Director Arafat Mazhar's Swipe may be watched online for free.



By Hasan Kazmi

Director Arafat Mazhar's animated short film *Swipe* continues to garner acclaim at one after the other international events.

The latest of a series of laurels the 14-minute hand-painted short has bagged is the Special Jury Award at ANIMAFEST International Animation Festival, considered the Oscars of animated movies.

The thought-provoking animated short is the first of its kind Pakistani film that has earlier featured at Annecy International Animation Film Festival 2021 as well as Animafest Zagreb.

Swipe premiered in November 2020 on YouTube. It narrates us the story of a boy who is addicted to iFatwa, an app that crowdsources religious death sentences. It allows users to vote in favour of or against the person whose case is submitted. The accused with 10,000 swipes (right) is sentenced to death publicly.

The film discusses the nexus of extremism and access to ICT. According to the film's official synopsis, "*Swipe* is a hand-painted animated short film about Pakistan made by a team of 20 Pakistani animators, musicians, storytellers, and actors over the course of one year."

Director Arafat Mazhar told The Truth International (TTI) that *Swipe* is his second animated film after *Shehr-e-Tabassum*, but it is in making for the last 10 years because it took lot of my personal and team research that cantered on the idea because lots of

words e.g. honour, love, traitor, blasphemy has been distorted in the recent past and forcibly linked with violence.

Arafat Mazhar opted out of several international film festival because he wants this film to be watched by Pakistanis and that is why it is available for free on YouTube.

Several international film festivals do not honour those films which have been released earlier in their own countries. Arafat Mazhar, wanted his countrymen to watch this film first before anyone else in the world so he opted for only those festivals who do not have such restrictions.

Arafat Mazhar elaborates that producing a hand-painted animated film is a long process where one has to draw 24 pictures for only 1 second so it takes lot of time and energy to draw characters and environment, and it took about a year to complete this.

The young director further said that he chose to make a hand-painted 2D world because computer generated images do not justify the imaginary world that we draw on paper using our creativity. Hand-painted technique also provides us the opportunity to play with colours and shadows freely, something using camera deprives us of.

Arafat Mazhar further said that people are continuously being told how to define love and honour. The scope of these words is getting narrowed while connotations of terms like traitor and blasphemer continue to broaden, so these terms are loosing their spirit.

He further added that dissenting voices are being silenced over the past few years, if not outright extinguished, and there is an excessive glorification of violence, as so many young people are resorting to violence in rallies organised by right-wing groups against marginalised communities.

"This happens when we feed them the manufactured meanings of honour and love, devoid of any spirituality, and it eventually becomes a deep reflection of our society with alarmingly narrow possibilities of love, mercy and humanity", he added.

Arafat Mazhar is the founder of Puffball Studios in Rawalpindi. It aims to "push the boundaries of digital storytelling" in Pakistan and produces original Urdu content to educate viewers about digital literacy, bully proofing, and reporting on social media.

"We want Puffball Studios to be a space where young animators eventually direct their own films."

In a Tweet, the director list the nods the short has scored so far. "How *Swipe* has done so far. 4 Oscar/BAFTA Qualifying festivals. We didn't apply a lot of film festivals which denies us the right to make film freely accessible (you can't screen at Venice if you release your film for free). Proud that we made it free AND received top laurels".

Available online for free at <https://swipe-thefilm.com>, the flick is nearing 100,000 views on YouTube.

The Misguided Racket of the Moral Brigade

The self-appointed custodians of our morals have gone into overdrive over a viral clip from a television serial without getting the whole picture.



By Kaukab Jahan

Hum TV's 'Juda Huay Kuch Is Tarha' is the subject of widespread criticism these days because it shows a man marry his milk-sister without either of the couple knowing they are milk siblings, and conceiving.

The couple come to know about this when the girl's paternal aunt (her uncle's wife) presents a maid as evidence, who says that Maha and Asad are milk-siblings. The story gets into a tense state as this complicated and difficult situation arises.

As would be expected, play attracted a wave of backlash, drawing condemnation from many quarters of society which consider it against our religious and societal norms.

"Those criticizing the play have not actually watched it", K Rehman, the writer of 'Juda Hoay Kuch Is Tarha (JHKIT)', told The Truth International (TTI). "They are commenting and making noise on a clip from the drama that went viral."

He further said that JHKIT is different from typical stories running on our television, based on perpetual feuding between saas

bahu and naand bhabi. "In the series, the leading lady is not continuously facing the cruel behaviour and hardships from her relations. It even shows the father seeking his daughter's consent before accepting a marriage proposal for her, which she refuses and marries another man at her will."

Rehman revealed that he wrote this play after encountering some real life incidents, which revolved around the issue of marriage between milk-siblings. "I am sure if people watch the whole play, they will know the girl's aunt has schemed a vicious plan with the help of a maid."

He further revealed that that write-up was with him for the last 10 years and he wanted to show the couple as actual milk-siblings but the content team of Hum TV asked him to do these changes in the story.

"I ask those who are criticizing the play that if the story had shown Maha and Asad marry each other even after knowing the fact of their relationship, there could be a reason to question it but here they are completely unaware of the fact. So I think this criticism

is unnecessary," Rehman added.

He explained that the moment the maid makes the revelation, the families separate the couple although they love each other madly and are expecting.

Rehman is a Hafiz-e-Quran himself and according to him he tried his best to not to hurt anyone's feelings while raising this issue. "Not a single character of the play has rejected the sanctity of the relation of milk-siblings. Asad just doubted the evidence given to prove this and said that if that was verified to be true, he would definitely end this relationship."

The serial is now in its final phase where the question would be raised about the expected child of the leading characters, Maha and Asad.

Rehman clarified that the play raises a real life issue and does not include any dishonest relationship like a girl with her brother in law or a boy with his sister in law. "I request everyone to watch the whole play first and then comment on it."



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