

The Truth International

1st - 15th November 2021

Appointment of DG ISI
History of difficult decisions

Costly IMF Package
Rupee devaluation & higher inflation

Dharna Again
A bad tradition of amassing people

A Difficult Man



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On a self-destructive course?

By M. Ziauddin

It was purely a slapstick comedy that the PTI-led coalition government's legal team had enacted in August 2019 while attempting to extend the services of COAS General Qamar Javed Bajwa for three more years. It was touch and go, indeed. Had the other party not shown extreme composure, the one-page mantra would have gotten torn to pieces very early in the day. And now the nearly three-week long foot dragging being enacted in full public view by Prime Minister Imran Khan on the matter of issuing a notification appointing the successor of ISI Chief Lt. General Faiz Hamid seems to have all but sent the country on a journey into the unknown. The PTI government, nonetheless, issued the notification of new DG ISI on Oct 26 and Lt-Gen. Nadeem Anjum will assume the charge of his new responsibility from Nov 20, 2021.

Most of the seeming political blunders committed by the PTI-led coalition government over the last three years or so could be attributed to the lack of experience of running a government on the part of ruling Party which has never seen or worked our bureaucratic system from inside.

Even more so, if the party is headed by someone who has never walked the labyrinth that is called the Government.

Politicians come and go but bureaucracy constitutes the permanent government that then makes up the system. Only those politicians who have worked this system for some time do know how to handle the permanent government that is how to make it work in accordance with the elected government's political agenda. This bureaucracy is very good at making rings around novices. That is perhaps what has actually happened.

The PTI, a youthful political party led by a globally known Mr. Clean with Greek features, having proven his mettle in the world of sports. Builder of a world class cancer hospital and an equally world class educational institution. A great communicator. Darling of the media and seemingly endowed with an ideology anchored in the principles of justice and fair play.

But surprisingly, it seems as if the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan has already tumbled into the fifth year of its first term in office. And more surprisingly, this is happening to a political party which came to power with the civil-military establishment rolling out the red carpet all the way en route to power.

Indeed, even before the government completed the first 100 days in the saddle the PM was seen sleep-walking into the lobbies of national and international vested interests as he handed over party affairs to the second-tier leadership without having got it first to gel. The party immediately fell victim to infighting. And the government, he handed over to non-party technocrats selected by non-political agencies with their own narrow agenda in mind.

Indeed, rather than focusing on governance, PM Imran Khan seems to have turned into a vigilante force of moralizers. While the Khan-led moralizers seem to be trying to inflate their own social and moral standing in the public eye by daily flaunting their moral virtues, they also seem to take carnal pleasure in the public humiliation of their 'corrupt' victims. Reminders are voiced almost round the clock by party spokespersons promoting Khan as being the cleanest of the clean Pakistanis.

That such moralizers as a rule suffer from strong doses of hypocrisy, sanctimoniousness, pomposity, pretension and conformism is not an exaggerated notion. That is why we see frenzied media trials of the 'corrupt' and the NAB persecuting rather than prosecuting. NAB's problem since its launch has been its very weak prosecution wing. And what it receives as evidence from investigation agencies is normally too flimsy because of corruption and inefficiency within the investigation agencies themselves. And there are these officially appointed commissions to 'forensically' investigate current corruption cases like the one appointed to investigate the sugar scandal which named and shamed some even belonging to the ruling parties. These reports are being flaunted as evidence that Khan has no friends when it comes to fighting corruption.

Yes, of course, one must be extremely wary of those who persecute in the name of principle. But then one cannot condone corruption while criticizing vigilante moralizers. Khan and his party have all the right to investigate and prosecute the corrupt. But laws of the land alone do not have the ability to curb corruption. However, many civilized countries have succeeded in curbing corruption, if not eliminating it completely, by establishing a strong parliament, an independent judiciary and a fearless media. Without these social controls no amount of laws and moralizing can curb corruption.

And of course you don't replace your finance ministers at the drop of a hat, and that too at junctures you are least expected to be taking such a decision. Nobody in his/her remotest imagination had anticipated a change of guard at the 'Q' block right

when PTI's first finance minister Asad Umar had just returned home from Washington after having negotiated a three-year \$6 billion Extended Fund Facility with the IMF. But that is exactly what had happened when Dr Hafeez Shaikh, former finance minister in the Zardari government was brought in to replace PTI's poster boy. And then with another annual budget only a few weeks away the government, in what appeared to be a surprise move, replaced Dr Shaikh with, of all people, another former finance minister of the Zardari government, Shaukat Tarin, and that too seemingly without any sound political or economic rhyme or reason.

But neither of the two Zardari finance ministers is an economic wizard to merit being sought after seemingly so earnestly by Khan's government. The performance of the two as finance ministers in president Zardari's government had remained largely mediocre. Both had failed to navigate the economic ship of the Zardari government out of troubled waters. One had no illusions about Dr Shaikh's performance over the last two years. Tarin's performance is not likely to be any different.

Media being a public service industry and truth being its main output — while it is constantly tested for quality at the bar of its credibility and integrity — needs all the freedom required to make the commodity available to the general public without fear or favor.

Given the peculiar socio-cultural, politico-economic and security conditions of a society in which the media industry

functions, and also given the dynamism of each of these conditions that continuously keep pushing the boundary lines, the industry cannot be forced to abide by a straight-jacketed code of ethics. In plain words, what is taboo for media today could be kosher tomorrow.

The best course therefore is to leave it to the media industry to keep evolving a code of ethics of its own, dictated continuously by the constant changes occurring in the code of ethics governing a society. And since its quality is tested at the bar of its integrity and credibility, media organizations worth their name, in their own self-interest, would try not to digress or transgress from their main public service role of seeking the truth, and nothing but the truth.

And in case of any serious digression or transgression the industry could be

subjected to the existing laws of the land. There is no need for introducing special laws to discipline the media.

In a free market economy to keep the profit motive of the private sector within the bounds of reason, each industrial sector is regulated by a specific autonomous regulatory body set up under laws legislated by parliament. The private sector media industry too needs to be regulated by such a body.

Therefore, to make them truly autonomous regulatory authorities, a bipartisan parliamentary committee could constitute an executive board (EB) comprising members representing all walks of life. The EB could appoint a CEO on pure merit with the latter answerable to the EB who in turn will be answerable to the bipartisan parliamentary committee which would answer to parliament.

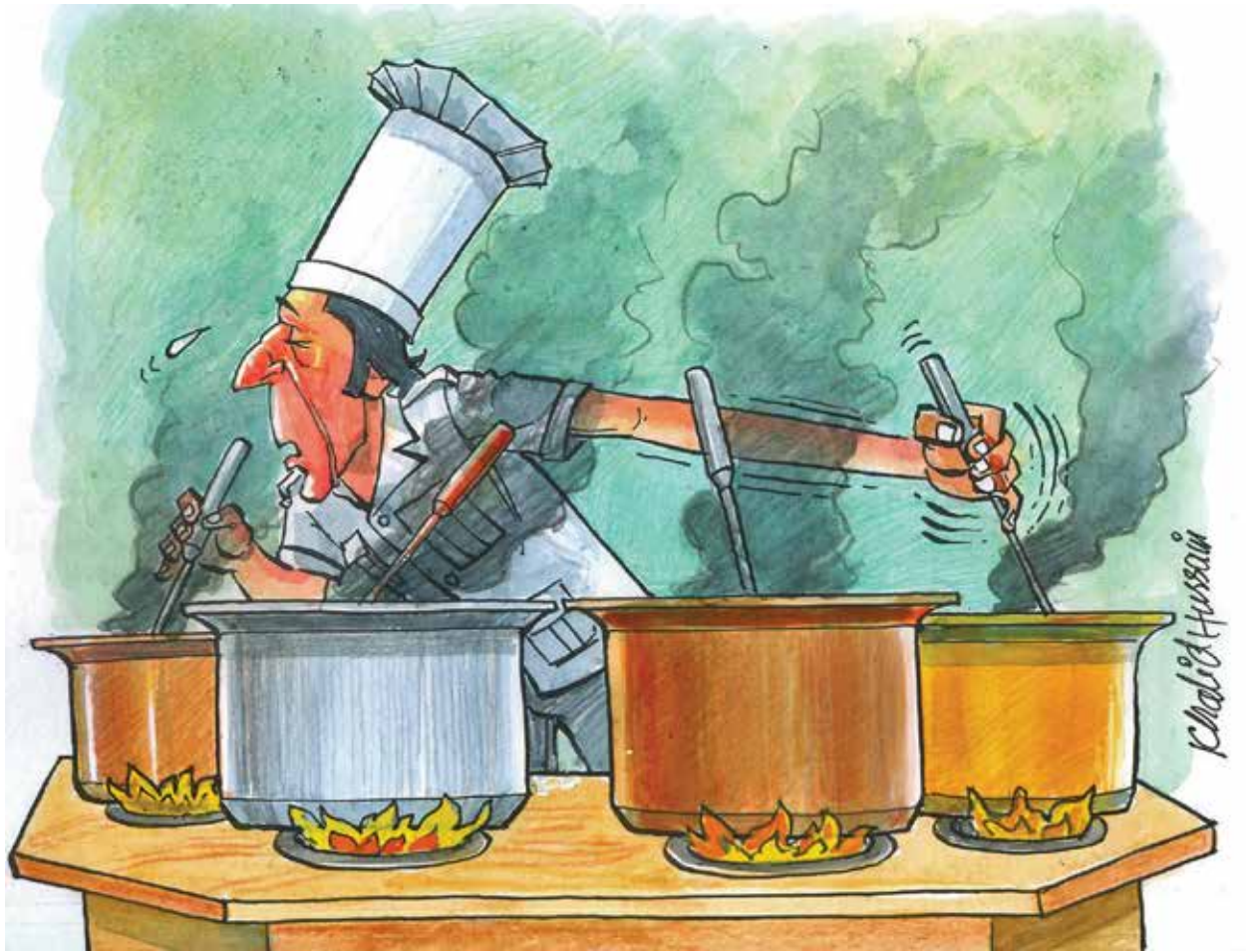


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Decision Delayed - Decision Accepted



By Hammad Ghaznavi

The PTI government has a knack for making a mess of simple matters. The list of such muck ups is lengthening by the day. True, the hybrid system in place at present is not always aligned with the constitution, and in the absence of a clear constitutional path, confusion and botch ups become a way of life. In many situations, however, it is solely the Imran Khan government responsible for wresting confusion from the jaws of certainty. Is the trait inherent in the prime minister's personality? Or is the decision making process of the government faulty, depending on factors beyond the realm of reason and logic? Examples of the jumbled up decision making are numerous. Let's discuss the phenomenon which goes to show it is not about bad decision making; it is chaotic decision making.

Delay in the appointment of Director General of Inter-Services Intelligence,

or lack of it, is a classic example of Imran Khan's ability to create confusion out of a matter hitherto considered routine. It is not one of those confusions that we witness every other day in running the country's affairs, as the matter involves the most sensitive intelligence institution of the country that prefers to stay out of the limelight. At least as for the appointment of its DG, the ISI had never been discussed in the media. The credit goes to Mr Khan for this 'first'.

Though the details of the confusion have been discussed at length both in the media and drawing rooms, it seems in the fitness of things to present a brief backgrounder here. After a meeting of the PM and COAS, some postings and transfers in the army were announced by the ISPR on October 5th. One of the appointments was that of Lt General Nadeem Ahmed Anjum as the new DG ISI, replacing Lt General Faiz Hameed. As per tradition, the notifica-

tion of the DG ISI appointment is issued by the PM secretariat. Many thought that it's the famous (or infamous) 'same page' that has led to the DGISI notification springing up first from the ISPR, and will be followed by a notification from the PM office. That, however, was not to be. The government spokespersons kept telling the nation that the PM office will issue the notification in a day or two. That was not to be. Confusion worse confounded! The 'former' DG ISI is still participating in the top level meetings as incumbent DG ISI. As the DG he also visited Afghanistan last week. He was supposed to take charge as Corps Commander Peshawar on October 25th. Meanwhile, the PM met the 'new DGISI' appointed through the ISPR notification, but nothing followed in the form of a PM office notification. It's chaos with a capital C. Finally, the government issued the notification of new DG ISI Lt-Gen. Nadeem Anjum



on Oct 26, who will assume the charge of his new responsibility from Nov 20, 2021.

Sources insist that in the PM-COAS meeting, the PM agreed on the name forwarded by the military commander. Later, he changed his mind due to reasons best known to him. The top government sources reveal that whenever the PM is asked by his lieutenants as for the reasons of the delay in the notification, his response is vague. 'A notification will be issued soon,' he has been quoted as saying by different ministerial level sources. Meanwhile, the social media accounts and Youtubers considered pro-Imran Khan, have been churning out stuff pointing to numerous previous occasions where Mr Khan's decisions were frowned upon by the chief, for one the Punjab CM appointment, or the decisions were shoved down his throat, like the appointment of Pakistan ambassador to Saudi Arabia. The message from the Khan camp was that PM's hands were tied because of the tinkering with the system by the powers that be – but no more.

Whatever the truth, the social media is rife with the opinion that the decision making at the helm is influenced by the occult, referring to the spiritual side of the first lady. The international press is also dubbing our helmsman's decisions a result of spiritual hide and seek, numerology, positioning of stars, etc. Such influences on the PM have been talked about for some time and ignored, generally with a smile, have finally landed him in the deepest trouble of his political career. In a nutshell, whatever the reasons, logical or otherwise, this chaotic decision making has visibly begun to take its toll. The government, all of a sudden, looks wonky, the masses are confused, the system is paralyzed. It is not merely a game of chess being played between the power players. The chaos has halted the country in every sphere, with Inflation multiplying by the hour and the discontent among the masses spiraling up, while the government is busy playing the notification game. Now, even if the confusion is resolved, an irreparable damage is done to the 'same page arrangement'. The dream run is over. It is downhill from here. This is what confused decision making can do to a government considered the most stable in our political history only till a month back.

The extension of COAS, two years ago, was not a less chaotic episode. A simple notification of two lines was written and rewritten by the government's legal eagles many a time. The Supreme Court of Pakistan, so to speak, came to assistance of the attorney general and finally the government succeeded in writing a small paragraph straight. The matter was resolved in the nick of the time, the day the COAS was retiring. It was chaotic. The government didn't know if it was 'limiting of retirement', a 'reappointment' or an 'extension'. The President's notification concerned called it a reappointment, while the attorney general described it as an extension in the court. It was embarrassing for all involved, including the COAS, who had to participate in the cabinet meeting to help the legal wizards put together a plausible case for extension.



This incompetence and confusion go much beyond the military matters. The government policy on CPEC is a case in point. When the PTI came into power, one of its ministers concerned, Abdul Razzaq Dawood, said in plain words that the projects under CPEC were being halted for a year. The other ministers insisted that the CPEC was running full throttle. The same confusion continued for about three years, until the Chinese spoke. 'It's been slowed down under the present government,' said the Chinese Ambassador in Pakistan. Likewise, there have been confusing statements on Pak-US relations. 'Absolutely Not' has remained a famous slogan in this regard while now there have been reports suggesting Pakistan's nod to an air corridor for US forces to carry out opera-

tions in Afghanistan. The government offended China on the one hand, and failed to please USA on the other. To say the least, our foreign policy appears confused and failing.

In a meeting with Turkish President Erdogan and Malaysian PM Mahathir in September 2019 in New York, Imran Khan agreed to participate in the upcoming KL Summit, reportedly aiming at establishing a platform parallel to OIC. Imran Khan backed out, reportedly under the Saudi pressure. Later, reports suggest, our military leadership had to intervene to seek pardon for the PM. It was confused decision making that soured Pakistan's relations with its three closest friends in the Islamic world, especially Saudi Arabia.

The list of such confused and chaotic decision making is unending. The curious

case of Justice Qazi Faiz Essa is a glaring example. The government tried and tried to dislodge him from the bench. The government failed but kept the nation confused for over a year. A recent example is that of Tehrik-e-Labbaik Pakistan. The government banned the outfit but then allowed it to participate in the by-elections. They are true 'ashiq e Rusool' or 'terrorists', the government has been sending confusing signals.

The Khan government has a history of confused decision making. But it has been getting away with it. That's it. No more, as it was the shelter of the same page that handled the grand confusion. Khan sahib has taken a saw to the branch he was sitting on.



Damage Done by the Page Gone to Shreds?

Will the tiff over a high-profile appointment be the proverbial last straw on the camel's back?



By Naveed Miraj

The PTI government used to take credit of maintaining excellent and extraordinary relations with the military establishment and often the lexeme 'unprecedented' was also used to add value to it. Nonetheless, even apart from the recent standoff on the appointment of DG ISI, the relations have never been so smooth and trouble free as depicted over the last three years.

As time passed after Prime Minister Imran Khan's rise to power, one crack after another appeared in the civ-mil relationship until finally the bigger and far wider one that tore 'the same page' to pieces.

According to the insiders fully aware of what was happening away from the public eye, the first crack between the PTI government and the establishment appeared on the issue of changing the face in Punjab. Well within the first year of PTI govern-

ment in power, questions were raised on the performance of Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, running the largest province, Punjab.

The Establishment, after receiving many complaints during this period, politely tried to convince Khan to change the face in Punjab, but he was termed as "Wasim Akram Plus" by none other than the Prime Minister himself. Sources say that this still remains a point of difference between PM Imran Khan and the Establishment.

Later, the differences were also witnessed on the issue of allowing former Prime Minister and leader of PML (N) Nawaz Sharif to go abroad for medical treatment. The government was totally against providing any sort of relief to the former Prime Minister and party's Vice President Maryam Nawaz convicted in couple of corruption cases.

Although it was the Lahore High Court which allowed Nawaz Sharif to travel abroad without any indemnity bond as demanded by the government, speculation was rife at that time of a deal or understanding between PML (N) and the establishment as soon as Nawaz Sharif left for London aboard an air ambulance.

Alluding to the suspension of jail term and bails granted to Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and son in law Captain Safdar within a few weeks, the sources said that everything was done through proper channels and within the system to negate the impression of any deal.

They said that allowing Maryam Nawaz also to go abroad was also part of the deal but the government did not let this happen much to the annoyance of the establishment, which expected a semblance of political stability in the bargain that would help focus



on the economy. However, the rigidity of the government came stood its way.

Similarly, the sources said that removal from Exit Control List (ECL) of PML (N) President Shahbaz Sharif, who has always tried to maintain good and cordial relations with the establishment unlike his elder brother, was also part of deal with the establishment.

Soon after the court order on the matter, the PML (N) President wanted to go abroad but he was off loaded by the FIA team from a Doha bound flight at Lahore Airport. The sources said this was sufficient to further irk the establishment and strain the civ-mil ties.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has until recently gone out of his way to give the impression of the establishment being supportive and standing by his policy and decisions. According to sources, this is not the case in reality.

Especially on the issue of handling with Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Prime Minister Imran Khan and the Army are not in agreement. The Prime Minister is keen on appeasement but the Army is opposed to any leniency with a terrorist outfit responsible for the deaths of many Pakistanis including security personnel.

Against this backdrop, what really brought to fore the rift between the Prime Minister and the Army Chief is the issue of transfer of current DG ISI Faiz Hameed to Peshawar Corps and the appointment of the current Corps Commander of Karachi Lieutenant General Nadeem Anjum to the seat of top spymaster. Notification is now issues and seemingly issue is settled, but the traces it has left might cause future discords.

Faiz Hameed is supposed to be the person who has hitherto supported and saved the incumbent regime from the onslaught of the opposition parties as well as dealing with other challenges especially on the internal front.

The sources said Prime Minister Imran Khan trusts Faiz Hameed more than anyone else and he wanted him to stay on as the DG ISI by March next year or by at least December to better deal with any political challenge to be thrown his way by his opponents. In particular, Gen Faiz would be nice to have around to defeat any imminent no confidence motion against Khan in the National Assembly.

Another reason cited by the government circles to prolong his stay at the ISI is the evolving situation in Afghanistan. Anyway

the non-issuance of new DG ISI's notification is being seen by the Army as challenging the authority and prerogative of the Army Chief on inter departmental transfer. In the last Corps Commanders' meeting, the commanders insisted that the recent transfers made by the Army Chief including that of the new DG ISI must go ahead and that it should no longer be delayed.

The sources said that the statements made by the ministers regarding the appointment of the DG ISI have further damaged the government-military relationship and brought the Prime Minister in a difficult situation.

The fact is that the final notification has carried no change but would have the same name for the DG ISI as put forward by the Army Chief. However, the damage done is irreversible and the fragmented same page cannot be scotch-taped again.

While though may be end of the Khan-Bajwa bonhomie, the prime minister could still survive and complete his mandated term as given the internal economic situation and external challenges especially the situation in neighbouring Afghanistan, the country can ill afford political instability.





Captain Cool vs Benefactor-in-Chief?

Who would have thought this match made in heaven could give us hell on earth?

By Umer Farooq

Perhaps the time for political change in Islamabad has arrived—as the PTI led coalition government faces several threats to its continued survival—the signs of instability are fast rising on the political horizon of the country. What are these signs? The disruptive political forces like Tehrik-e-Labak Pakistan (TLP) are out on the streets challenging the government's writ. They are generally perceived as a proxy of those non-representative institutions which are never interested in political stability. So TLP's riots like protests are the first sign that the time for the PTI government to go home has arrived. Second sign is that the main opposition parties have been galvanized and are out in the streets to mobilize public opinion. The opposition parties are not ready to settle down on anything less than fresh, fair and free elections. So in their view Prime Minister Imran Khan should go home, though they have not laid down how he should be ousted from power.

Just like many other political crises like situations which led to regime change in the past, the economic and financial indicators of the economy's health are not good. The rupee hit a record low of 173.20 in the second week of last month in intra-day trading against the US dollar following media reports that talks with the IMF had failed. It closed at 172.78, below the previous close of 171.18. Pakistan and the IMF held their latest talks in Washington from October 4 to 15 for the release of a \$1bn tranche from a \$6bn extended loan facility approved in 2019. The reports claimed that the talks did not lead to a staff-level agreement because of differences over a macroeconomic framework and uncertainty over the country's economy. The PTI government faced considerable difficulty in convincing the public opinion that the talks have not failed. This situation caused all types of rumors doing the rounds in Islamabad.

Two unrelated developments in the last week of the month seemed to have taken



steam out of crisis-bubble. Firstly Saudis extended a financial support package of \$4.2 billion to Pakistani government which resulted increasing the value of Pakistani Rupee by Rs 2.27 against the US Dollar in inter-bank market. In the second development, Pakistani finance minister, Shaukat Tareen announced that IMF had agreed to provide a facility of \$2.78 billion to Pakistani government to meet its budgetary requirements. This was deemed necessary to combat the financial impact of COVID-19 pandemic. Both these developments are likely to mitigate the political crisis like situation that Imran Khan Government seems to be facing. How long these developments will help PTI Government in control the crisis will depend upon how quickly the government will convert economic and financial easing out facilities to mitigate the effects of inflation and price hike on common man in the society. This will not be an easy task as there are number of pressure groups and elite clubs in the society which are clamoring for more funds, more cash in the face of deteriorating economic conditions of the country.

All this was happening in the backdrop of a crisis like situation over an apparent deadlock over the appointment of new DG ISI. The Prime Minister rejected the announcement made by the media wing of

Pakistan Army that Lt General Nadeem Anjum has been appointed new DG ISI and asked the military authorities to initiate a fresh process for the appointment. This involved a summary to be sent from GHQ to the Prime Minister Secretariat, containing three names to be considered for the office of DG ISI. Just like many former Prime Ministers in the post-Zia period, Prime Minister Imran Khan seems to come under the sway of his political desire to see his favorite man in the slot of Director General Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI). And just like previous examples, Prime Minister Imran Khan's wish will be frustrated, if not immediately, then in the due course of time. Till the filing of this story notification for the appointment of Lt General Nadeem Anjum as new DG ISI has not been issued, which gives strength to the rumors that Prime Minister, Imran Khan has refused to give consent to the appointment as announced by ISPR—the media wing of the army. Military experts and analysts (mostly on the condition of anonymity) told The Truth International that Pakistan Army leadership have in the past demonstrated the capacity to keep ISI under its control and not to allow Prime Ministers too much space to independently deal with the ISI. They cite two cases in the recent past, a) when in 1988 Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto appointed a retired Army



general, Shams-ur-Rehman Kullue as DG ISI, b) when Prime Minister, Nawaz Sharif appointed his loyalist and army general from non-combat forces, Lt General Zia-ud-din Butt as DG ISI. “In both cases the Prime Minister’s men were sidelined and GHQ boycotted them” said a senior retired military official on the condition of anonymity. In the case of first General Aslam Beg attempted to make Military Intelligence (MI) as the intelligence arm of the GHQ and in the case of second, General Pervez Muahrraf shifted important files and projects away from ISI. ISPR announced the appointment of Lt General Nadeem Anjum as new DG ISI as part of routine postings and transfers in the army. Within 24 hours social media however went into an overdrive hinting that Prime Minister Imran Khan has refused to sign the summary of DG ISI’s appointment. Some of the analysts even predicted that there was a confrontation building up between COAS and Prime Minister. All this reinforced the rumors that change of government was just round the corner.

The appointment of Lt General Nadeem Anjum as DG ISI also confirms that the issue between the military leadership and Prime Minister, Imran Khan has been resolved amicably. There is, however, an interest proviso in the official notification of the New DG ISI, wherein the outgoing DG, Lt General Faiz Hameed has been retained as DG ISI till November 19th November. The political circles have already attached political significance to this proviso—as General Faiz is known to be the favorite of Prime Minister and Lt General Nadeem Anjum is deemed a candidate of GHQ—there was a whispering campaign in Islamabad which warned the Prime Minister not to bypass the GHQ’s nominee otherwise there is going to be trouble. Well, finally he didn’t dare to bypass GHQ’s man, but succeeded in retaining his favorite till November 19th. The closed door nature of Pakistan decision making process will not allow the people to know the significance of November 19th, 2021.

There, however, were important ingredients of a crisis-like situation—similar situations in the past had led to regime change—missing from the scene. For instance non representative institutions like the military, intelligence services or judicia-

ry are not as active as they were at the time of ouster of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif from power. In fact it would not be an exaggeration to say that military leadership and intelligence services are simply non-active in this crisis. For instance there are no voices coming from the GHQ extending support to the protestors, who are out on the streets shouting slogans against the government and vowing to disrupt civil life. TLP’s riots like protests and disruptive tendencies it has demonstrated are similar in nature and content to the one they launched against the Nawaz Sharif government in 2017. But this time there are no ISPR press release advising the government not to use violence against disruption caused by the protestors. Neither do we see a general in uniform distributing cash among protestors to cause them to disperse. Similarly there is no DG ISPR raising slogans from his official podium to lend support to the cause of TLP protestors.

There are those among the political analysts who are saying the present tensions over the appointment of new DG ISI are stage-managed. Nothing could be further from the truth. The stakes, on both sides, are real and high. The man on the horseback is walking a tightrope. He cannot afford to take anything lightly, or in a carefree manner because he is being watched continuously and persistently both from within the Army rank and file and by the society at large. He has to maintain his and his institution’s images as an omnipotent power center, which in the public imagination is perceived as savior of the nation and influencer of decision-making at the highest level.

And here we have an army which is in love with its image primarily because image—image means how the army leadership is perceived within the rank and file and how it is perceived in the society at large—is a source of its political power. Any move on the part of anyone in the public realm—any verbal statement or any act, policy or decision—that could affect the image of the army as an institution or the image of army top brass could provoke a reaction. And this reaction is not necessarily a controlled, stage-managed well calculated response to any move from outside. This could be an instantaneous reaction of an organization which is more than half million in strength and whose

“anger” and “happy” have in the past influenced the course of political developments in the country. The appointment of DG ISI and the way the government has prolonged the process by not completing the process could hardly be described as a situation that is stage managed to divert attention away from government’s other troubles or wrong decisions.

This is a situation which can potentially erode relations of trust between Army top brass and Prime Minister Imran Khan. Here is a patent lesson for the Prime Minister even before this episode comes to an end: Pakistan Army as an institution doesn’t like to be led by a general who is caught hobnobbing with political leadership and is perceived as someone who had been playing second fiddle to the political leadership. Many great military careers in the Pakistan Army have been slaughtered at the altar of political loyalties. Such Army generals are hardly left in a condition capable of serving the political interest of their political masters. Pakistan Army as an institution loves to see Army Generals play politics during their careers—as often most of them do indulge in the politics—but only when their politics serves the institutional interests. It will be wise on the part of Prime Minister Khan to realize that he cannot control the institution through an individual. A little history of Bhutto’s and Nawaz Sharif’s dealing with the institution of the Army will serve him well. Both tried and failed in the attempts to control the army through individuals.

But one factor clearly goes in favor of Prime Minister Imran Khan: It is the hardening of attitude on the part of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. His diatribes against the military leadership or Bajwa-Faiz combine are unique in Pakistan’s political culture and history. Never before has the leader of the main opposition party publicly and persistently condemned military leadership. This has provided Imran Khan and the PTI government with enough space to move and act with impunity—and to take liberty in dealing with military and intelligence services. Imran Khan’s attitude and acts might be hastening the process at the end of which military leadership will make public its lack of tolerance for politicking that might in their perception clash with the smooth functioning of the state institutions.



PDM Embarks on a New Round of Agitation

This time, the opposition coalition is out to protest citing runaway inflation – a message that may resonate with the masses.



By Khalid Wasim

The opposition parties are in the streets once again with a renewed pledge to give a final push to the present set-up under the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI).

Unlike the past, the opposition parties this time have (moral if not physical) support of the masses, bearing the brunt of the unprecedented inflation, continuous devaluation of the rupee against the US dollar, raise in power tariff and recent back-to-back massive increases in the petroleum fuel prices which have now reached a record level.

The federal government's 16 October decision to raise the prices of petrol by more than PKR 10 and diesel by over PKR 12 per litre has not only prompted the opposition parties to give a call for the anti-government protests, it has also caused ripples within the ruling coalition.

A number of elected representatives from the treasury are heard admitting in their private conversations they are finding it difficult to defend the government's economic policies anymore.

Some of them fear public backlash in the near future when the people face the real

impact of the recent increases in oil prices on their pockets. Most of them are worried because all this is happening at a time when the next general election is less than two years away.

They know the people are no more ready to buy their theory of putting the blame of everything on the past governments. The migratory birds of our politics, otherwise known as "electables" have already started scouting far and wide to find more favourable perches in time for the general election.

Some of the government ministers are also openly admitting that there has been a significant price-hike in the country. Terming it a global phenomenon, they are now claiming that the government will soon announce special measures to counter the rise in the prices of various commodities, particularly the food items.

The government's recent unpopular decisions to increase prices of electricity and petroleum products have provided an ample opportunity to the opposition parties to take political advantage of the situation and the changing public sentiments against the Tabdeeli Sarkar.

However, the question arises: Will the opposition attempt to mobilise the masses on its own for a premature ouster of the incumbent government or will it continue to look for behind-the-scenes nod from the real power players in the country?

The opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) took the lead in announcing protests against the government over unbridled inflation and hike in petroleum and electricity prices compelling the others, including the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), Awami National Party (ANP), and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI), to give a call their own protest rallies in several parts of the country.

Terming it a 'continuation of the mini-budgets', Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) president and Leader of the Opposition in the National Assembly Shahbaz Sharif lashed out at the government for the petrol price hike and the recent 14 percent increase in electricity prices. He called for the prime minister's resignation for what he called crushing people to death with inflation.

"Imran should accept his own assessment



and resign instead of clinging on to the office of prime minister,” Mr Shahbaz said, adding that people were screaming and cursing the government.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, in a tweet, stated: “The PTI has brought a tsunami of inflation in the country by bringing [prices of] petroleum products to the highest level in the history of the country.

“The rise in petrol and diesel prices a day after the hike in electricity prices proves that Imran Khan is an anti-people prime minister”.

It was after the approval of the central committee of the PDM to the longstanding demand of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman to launch a countrywide agitation against the government on 18 October 2021 that the PDM finally kicked off its nationwide protest from various cities of Punjab, including Rawalpindi, and Lahore.

The PPP launched its own campaign from Islamabad and Karachi. Sindh Chief Minister Syed Murad Ali Shah himself participated in one of the protest demonstrations. The PDM has so far announced that it will stage protests only in big cities and will take a decision about holding public meetings or a long march at the later stage.

Announcing the decisions taken during the meeting of party heads of the component parties of the PDM, Maulana Fazlur Rehman told the media that the coalition planned a series of protests and rallies at the district level across the country from 20 October against runaway inflation and increasing cost of essential items.

“The PDM will lead rallies and demonstrations, stand shoulder to shoulder with people and get them their due rights,” the Maulana reportedly stated, adding the coalition would gradually turn up the heat by holding wheel-jam strikes and eventually a long march.

On this occasion, he reiterated the call for fresh general elections in the country. He voiced his opposition to the idea of holding the local government elections, maintaining there was no reason to hold these elections when there was no legitimate government in the country.

Talking informally to reporters in Islamabad a day after the resignation of Balochistan Chief Minister Jam Kamal Khan Alyani, JUI-F secretary general Senator Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haideri said change had arrived in the country and those in power should brace for more of it.

To a question, Haideri alleged that the military establishment was supporting the outgoing Balochistan chief minister, but it failed to save him. “Pindi was supporting [Jam Kamal] but in the end, it failed”, said Mr Haideri when asked if the establishment had any role in the changes taking place in Balochistan.

Although the JUI-F senator passed these remarks in a lighter vein and in response to a question, political analysts find the observation interesting in the wake of the recent controversy over the appointment of the director general (DG) Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI).

There is a general belief among some of the political experts that the military establishment is no more interested in supporting the present set-up as there is resentment within the army’s ranks over the controversy over the appointment of the DG ISI which is a very sensitive post.

They believe that the establishment has stopped supporting the present set-up, which is why it did not lift a finger to defend Jam Kamal’s government in Balochistan; and that it will likewise remain aloof if similar challenges are mounted against any other government, provincial or federal.

It was perhaps in this context that the PPP has once again asked the PML-N to consider no-confidence motions against Prime Minister Imran Khan and Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, saying the time was now conducive for such a move.

“To get rid of Imran Khan, a no-confidence motion will have to be tabled,” said PPP information secretary and MNA Shazia Marri in a statement. “Opposition Leader [Shahbaz Sharif] should immediately bring a no-confidence motion against Imran Khan”.

Marri said that first a no-trust motion should be moved against Mr Buzdar as it would be easier to remove Prime Minister Imran Khan after the Punjab chief minister’s ouster.

The PPP had quit the PDM in March this year due to differences over en masse resignations from the assemblies. At the time, it had suggested to the PDM leadership to consider no-confidence motions not only against the Prime Minister but also against the National Assembly Speaker and the Punjab Chief Minister.

The PPP had advocated opening talks with the PML-Q, an ally of the ruling PTI, to make a success of move, but the PML-N rejected the idea out of hand, declaring it could not join hands with the PML-Q because of its support for military dictator Gen Pervez Musharraf.

In another significant development, PML-N president Shahbaz Sharif publicly distanced himself from the slogans raised against an army general at the PDM’s protest rally in Faisalabad and declared that whosoever had raised the slogans had no link with the party.

“Sloganeering against heads of various wings of the armed forces in public meetings is neither in the national interest nor should it be allowed at any cost (particularly) in the present international perspective in which a new cold war is about to engulf the region”, Mr Sharif reportedly stated, while giving a message to the party leaders and workers not to target the establishment during the ongoing protests against the price-hike.

The political analysts are of the view that the next few weeks are crucial for Prime Minister Imran Khan and if he fails to come out with any announcement to provide relief to the common man, it will become a challenging task for the present coalition government to complete its five-year term.

Speaking at a news conference on 24 October, Interior Minister Sheikh Rashid Ahmed downplayed the opposition’s latest protest call, saying that the parties have in fact started their campaign for the next elections which are just 22 months away.

He also indirectly asked the nation to wait until the next budget, saying that the PTI government would announce an election budget to provide relief to the people. However, it seems the nation’s patience is running out and the masses are unlikely to hold their peace till the next budget, due in June 2022.



The Unlikely Sources of CM Buzdar's Strength

Here is why a no-trust move against Chief Minister Usman Buzdar is not imminent.



By Sarfraz Raja

He was criticized and maligned from the day he took his office. Some political pundits swore he would prove a weak chief executive for the country's most populous province. Others insinuated he was being brought in as part of a temporary arrangement to keep the seat warm for some other contender.

But Usman Buzdar has been running the largest province of the country for more than three years and he shows no signs of stopping now.

Usman Buzdar was a surprise package when his name was announced by PTI chief Imran Khan at a time when some heavy-weights like Aleem Khan, Fawad Chaudhary were also vying for the position.

To make matters worse for him, his government's majority in the provincial assembly was razor-thin, keeping the discussions of a no-trust move against him alive all along. Nothing of the sort, however, has come to pass.

More recently, after a no-trust motion was tabled in Baluchistan against Chief Minister Jam Kamal, such a move in Punjab came under discussion again as senior Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) leader Qamar Zaman Kaira offered PML-N to join hands for a no confidence move in Punjab. With some political statements from Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) highlighted the issue.

The initiative, however, quickly lost steam as senior Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Rana Sanaullah asked PPP to first complete, ensure, and prove majority for a successful in-house change.

Numbers game

To understand the scenario, first of all we have to look at the numbers in the provincial assembly where there are 370 members of six parties. According to the official website of the Provincial Assembly, the ruling PTI has 182 seats while its allies Pakistan Muslim League Q has 10 and Pakistan Rah-e-Haq party with one seat brings the total strength of the ruling alliance to 193.

Four of the five independent MPAs in the Assembly support the ruling coalition but they are independent in their decisions and are not legally bound to support government on every issue.

On the other hand, the opposition PML-N has 165 seats while the PPP has seven, making for a total of 172. The difference, therefore, stands at about 20. This means the opposition can turn the tables on Buzdar government if it can persuade PML-Q and a few independents to switch sides. However, their majority at 186-183 will be even thinner than Buzdar's 183-172.

A potentially problematic scenario is PTI's own Tareen group – with a strength of nearly two dozens of members – going rogue and joining hands with the opposition. But any such move would be at the pain of the MPAs crossing the floor being disqualified.

Whether Jahangir Tareen – or an opposition group wooing him – muster an inducement substantial enough to overcome this pain is open to question.

To sum it up, Buzdar's numbers are precarious, but the opposition dare bring a no-trust motion against him because if such a motion succeeds, their numbers would be even more insecure.



The PPP line

PPP is a strong advocate of in-house change, especially in Punjab, but with just seven seats in a house of 370, it simply lacks the clout to undertake any such venture on its own. PPP chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari repeatedly made his case for a change in Punjab but none of it has passed the muster with the PML-N, the real heavyweights in Punjab Assembly.

PPP considers in-house change in Punjab not only because it seems viable but also because its success could deal a major blow to Khan's PTI in political and psychological terms.



The PML-N view

Elements in PML-N earlier did some homework and calculations to regain power in Punjab, but the initiative got nowhere after it met vehement opposition but some of their top leadership specifically Nawaz Sharif was always against such move for some reason. With some informal and off the record chit chat with few N league brains it seems that

PML-N considers a weaker and unpopular chief minister like Usman Buzdar is politically favourable for them as they think poor performance of Buzdar Government and lack of powerful leadership in the province weakening Tehreek-e-Insaaf support base and actually pulling PTI voters towards PML-N.



So why should they get rid of a CM who is actually politically beneficial for them.

The other major issue is a lack of trust between PML-N and PPP as after some defeats in an abortive no confidence motion against Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani and again in election of Chairman Senate between Sadiq Sanjrani and Yousuf Raza Gillani.

The opposition coalition lost the election despite clear majority, causing embracement and demoralization to their supporters and members. PML-N is wary of a repeat of that episode. Lunging for an opportunity not really there could inflict great political damage on the party, especially when new elections are less than two years away.

That's why they are asking PPP to complete and ensure numbers and strength which seems an unwillingness on their part.

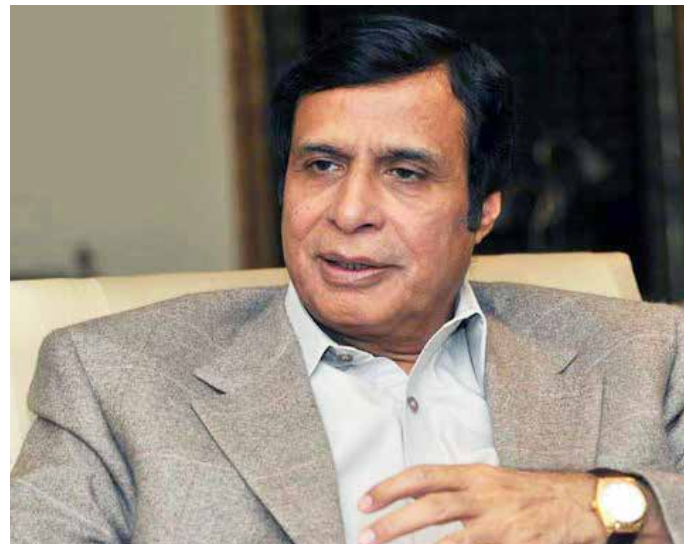
The PML-Q factor

With 10 seats in the Punjab Provincial Assembly, PML-Q is the third largest party in Pakistan's largest legislative chamber. It is an ally the Buzdar that holds the fate of the Buzdar government in its hands. If it switches sides, the government has little chance of standing.

In the recent past, PML-Q leader and Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Pervez Elahi had some reported contacts with some senior PML-N leaders. But PML-Q has a clear stance that Usman Buzdar should remain in power otherwise their candidate should replace them, a party insider told The Truth International (TTI).

Buzdar has enjoyed strong backing from his skipper Imran Khan who has consistently stood behind him like a rock. He famously called him the Waseem Akram Plus of his team and declared him a low-profile but efficient head of provincial government.

In the final reckoning, a divided opposition strengthens Buzdar's hand as much as Khan's wholehearted support. This is why despite his wafer-thin majority and pockets of criticism of and silent opposition to his rule within his own party ranks, Usman Buzdar is safe in be replaced so far and still seems on safe side.





United on Disunity

The opposition parties' resignation to disunity is PM Khan's strength.



By Zain Rihat

The first session of the current assembly was held on 13 August 2018 in which all the elected members took the parliamentary oath. On 17 August 2018, Imran Khan secured 176 votes and became 22nd Prime Minister of Pakistan while his contender Shahbaz Sharif received 96 votes.

If all goes well, the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf government will complete its 5-year constitutional term on 16 August 2023. However, there are certain indications that make one think of the possibility of early elections in the country.

Demanding holding of fresh general elections in the country, Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) President, Maulana Fazlur Rehman on 18 October (Monday) announced to launch a countrywide agitation against the government.

Announcing the decisions taken during the meeting of party heads of the component parties of the alliance, Rehman told media that a series of protest rallies would be staged across the country from 20 October, against rising inflation and increasing cost of essential items.

He said there will be rallies, wheel-jam strikes, and long marches. "We are not

discussing local bodies polls – the main issue is holding of free and fair general elections in the country," he demanded on behalf of the alliance.

A day earlier, Maulana had categorically ruled out any possibility of the PPP joining the PDM. "There is no chance of its return," he said when asked if the PPP could become part of the opposition alliance.

The PPP and Awami National Party (ANP) had parted ways with the PDM in April this year after PML-N's Shahid Khaqan Abbasi, in his capacity as the alliance's secretary general, issued them show-cause notices for nominating PPP leader Yousuf Raza Gilani as Opposition Leader in the Senate "in violation of the unanimous decision" of the PDM.

Separately, PPP Chairperson Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari on 17 October said the PPP would continue its anti-government campaign until Prime Minister Imran Khan was ousted. Addressing a rally at Karachi's Bagh-e-Jinnah in commemoration of those martyred in 2007 in the twin terror attacks in the city's Karsaz area, Bilawal claimed that the countdown to the government's end has begun.

PML-N took the lead and recorded its first anti-government protest in Rawalpindi on Wednesday, 20 October. It was organised exclusively by the party of former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

Even as the opposition parties share a common goal of ousting the PTI government, the position and strategy of each opposition party seems quite different. Every opposition leader has his own position on the issues of national importance and his own strategy. In some cases, they are not even willing to sit together to iron out a common strategy against the government.

It is clear the political opposition has pulled itself apart. With PML-N, JUI-F and some other opposition parties on one side and PPP along with ANP on the other, the differences between the two blocs of the opposition parties are quite clear. What is more, there is a continuing fight between the two blocs of the opposition as to who the real opposition is.

The two blocs are holding their separate public rallies although PTI remains the sole target for both of them. Still the PTI government has over one and a half year more to rule the country but the opposition seems trying to create an atmosphere of elections.



Do they have an inkling of early elections? Or, knowingly there is no early election, are they trying to keep themselves relevant? Only time will tell.

If the latter be the case, the opposition leadership could be out to engage the people well ahead of the elections. Or perhaps their public rallies indicate nothing but their frustration as their every effort to pull the PTI government down so far has failed.

It has not helped that the opposition parties lack a clear or coordinated strategy against the PTI. Each of the parties within the two opposition blocs has its own policies and priorities. Whether they can put aside their differences temporarily and unite on common goals and ideology in order to pool their voters' support remains an open question.

Knowing what we know of Pakistan's political culture, is it realistic to expect a cacophony of political players with very different policy goals to pool their resources in order to stop a particular party from gaining power? The answer is a resounding 'No'.

Given their divergent ideological origins, PML-N and PPP are unlikely to jointly contest PTI in the next general elections. They have long been political rivals and it is difficult to imagine a scenario in which these two parties can choose not to campaign against each other in the next elections.

The prospects of these two heavyweights channelling the anti-PTI sentiment into an electoral alliance are therefore dim. Politics, however, is the art of the possible.

Faced with a powerful common rival, long-standing adversaries PML-N and PPP may yet find reasons to coordinate.

An anti-PTI alliance seems inevitable at this juncture in Pakistan's history because that is the only way to beat the PTI.

Still, the dominant possibility remains that PTI would contest all the opposition parties separately and the latter may not, even if desirable, achieve the desirable ends.

Holding separate public rallies clearly indicates that they are not interested in an anti-government political alliance and what to talk about an anti-government electoral alliance.

The three major opposition parties – Pakistan Peoples' Party (PPP), Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), and Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) – come from different ideologies and traits, and most importantly, their priorities at this critical phase of the history are different.

Something that is good for PML-N may not benefit PPP politically and what suits PPP may hurt the sentiments of JUI-F supporters.

In particular, Nawaz Sharif's anti-establishment rhetoric is so heavy to carry along it has created clear divisions within his own party ranks. The possibility of PML-N being able to convince other opposition parties to join it in the chorus is therefore vanishingly small.

The leadership of the opposition parties seems in disagreement when it comes to the objectives of any anti-government movement. The possible objectives of the

anti-government movement may include a call for fresh elections, driving wedge between the PTI and the establishment, and immediate relief in the cases against top leadership of PPP and PML-N.

The fact remains that PPP finds no reason to go for early elections due to party's weaker position in all parts of the country except Sindh. Mid-term elections mean PPP will have to leave the Sindh government. With no hope of sweeping success in the next elections, PPP will never resign from the assemblies.

On the other hand, the PPP has been harbouring hopes of forming the next government in the centre. These hopes are hinged in no small way on the PPP's smart manoeuvring to distance itself from Nawaz Sharif's hard-line anti-establishment position.

About the only thing the opposition parties fully agree upon is rejection of the accountability process.

Under the circumstances, it is fair to expect the opposition will remain disunited and unable to hammer together an electoral alliance against the PTI in the foreseeable future, strengthening the hand of Prime Minister Khan.

What is more, it is increasingly clear they are aware of this limitation, which is they are preparing for the next elections under the garb of a protest campaign against rising inflation and 'unprecedented' hike in the petroleum prices. Although chances of an early general election in the country are dim, they still find it the most suitable way to engage the masses.





Islamabad March of proscribed organization exposes flaws in the system



TTI Report

ISLAMABAD: Bloody long-march of the proscribed militant outfit has led to several casualties and injuries to many others, including policemen and protesters. This violent long-march has exposed the approaches from both the sides – the government and the leaders of the banned organization.

On the one hand, the federal and provincial governments are changing their approaches regarding the long march while on the other, the protesters are using the religion card and engaging in violence.

A few days ago, the Punjab and federal governments formed committees which held meetings with the banned outfit chief Saad Riazi (now in jail in Lahore) and other leaders of this party. The meetings proved an exercise in futility as the protesters continued their long march, claiming that their demands were not met and this unexpected situation not only escalated tension in the country, but also caused more casualties in violent clashes on roads between police and protesters.

A few months ago, the same religious party launched a violent long-march which ended with an agreement between the government and the proscribed religious organization. A few conditions of the agreement was the release of the chief of this party in Oct-2021 and expulsion of the ambassador of France in Islamabad.

However, according to banned organization when the government did not honour the commitments made in the agreement within the prescribed deadline, the workers of the party again initiated Islamabad march from Lahore and Rawalpindi which led to gory clashes between the police officials and workers of the religious party. Consequently, eight policemen have been killed brutally in clashes, hundreds of cops have suffered injuries. The protesters too have suffered casualties and injuries.

Now a few questions arise in the mind of the people, upset by the ongoing skirmishes between police and banned outfit in Lahore, Murdike, Sadhoke, and Rawalpindi. Why the government is making commitments which it cannot fulfill? Why the ministers and spokespersons of the government were giving contradictory and confusing statements about the agreement, long-march, and clashes between police officials and party's workers?

Why the government is tolerating a policy that motivates a proscribed religious outfit to come on roads, street, use firearms, play with the lives of the law enforcement agencies (LEAs) personnel and paralyse the urban areas and important roads in the name of religion?

For how long the banned outfits would continue to take into hostage the entire

system in Pakistan and kill and injure as many officials of the law enforcement agencies as they want.

In the prevailing scenario, the federal and Punjab governments must evolve a solid policy that discourages militancy and ensures none of the proscribed outfits in Pakistan use religious card to create anarchy and unrest in the country.

Meanwhile, the government must ensure that whatever commitments the govt's teams make with the protesters are implemented in the letter and spirit to end the culture of mistrust that leads to violence.

In last few days, about eight policemen have been brutally killed by protesters, more than 400 cops have suffered injuries. Some of them have sustained fatal injuries. Also, the protesters of banned organization have faced casualties and fatalities, but their exact number is yet not available. Tension is mounting in the country with growing clashes and advancing march of the protesters.

The government, therefore, must draw a clear line to put an end to violence in the name of religion which we are seeing for many years. Let the peace prevail in the country and the religious parties practice religion and not the militancy to achieve their goals.



Qudoos Bizenjo Elected Unopposed CM of Balochistan

Balochistan Awami Party's (BAP) Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo has been elected unopposed as new Chief Minister of Balochistan as no nomination papers were filed against him.

"I will not speak but my work will speak louder than my words. There were few necessities which led to the no-trust vote situation and would try to serve the people of Balochistan better", Qudoos Bizenjo stated just after his election.

"I am thankful for Jam Kamal who resigned to save the party, I will take all with me for the overall benefit of the masses of the province", added Bizenjo.

Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo is a politician from PB-41 Awaran who served as the current Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan, in office from August 2018 to October 2021. He has been a member of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan since November 2002.

Previously, he was a member of the Balochistan Assembly from November 2002 to May 2018. He served as the 16th Chief Minister of Balochistan from 13 January 2018 to 7 June 2018 and served as Deputy Speaker of the Provincial Assembly of Balochistan from 2013 to 2015. He served in the provincial Balochistan cabinet between 2002 and 2013, as the minister of livestock.

A tussle in the province was seen in last few months as the unhappy members of provincial parliament were speaking again and again against Jam Kamal.

After Jam Kamal stepped down as the chief minister on Sunday evening, BAP nominated Bizenjo for the slot. However, the PTIs' parliamentary party in the province named Rind for the position.

In a tweet earlier, Khan said he had given his "utmost time and energy" for Balochistan's governance and development despite "many deliberate political hindrances".

"I would rather leave respectfully and not be part of their monetary agenda and bad governance formulation," he said, apparently referring to the disgruntled group comprising members of his own Balochistan Awami Party (BAP) and allies that had been demanding his resignation.

Earlier, PTI Parliamentary Leader Sardar Yar Mohammad Rind on Wednesday announced that he was pulling out of the race and backing Balochistan Awami Party's (BAP) Mir Abdul Qudoos Bizenjo for the chief minister's slot, bringing an end to the political void in the province.

On the Prime Minister Imran Khan's instructions, Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjrani and Defence Minister Pervez Khattak left for Quetta to resolve the matter.

Rind made the announcement while addressing a news conference at his residence accompanied by Bizenjo, who has recently resigned from post of the Balochistan Assembly speaker.



Also present on the occasion were Khattak, Sanjrani, BAP acting President Mir Zahoor Buledi, its founder Senator Saeed Ahmed Hashmi, general secretary Senator Manzoor Khan Kakar and chief organiser Mir Jan Muhammad Jamali.

Speaking on the occasion, Pervez Khattak said the PTI had already sided with BAP. "We have not interfered in the internal affairs of BAP. We will continue to work together," he added.

He said the new provincial government was expected to support the PTI. "We don't want the PTI to be bypassed. The PTI has supported BAP for the second time but it did not give us the status we deserved as an ally."

In response to a question, Khattak said he had met the PTI lawmakers in the province. "Sardar Rind was out of the country so we were unable to meet him. We will never forget our party." The defence minister said former chief minister Jam Kamal had resigned in a dignified manner.

In response to a question, he said the PTI faced no problems in the federation and Punjab. "The government does not fall just by talking and holding news conferences."

Speaking on the occasion, Rind said the PTI MPAs had expressed in a meeting that they were being completely ignored by BAP.

"There were expectations from BAP that were not fulfilled," he added. "[Then] Prime Minister Imran Khan then sent Pervez Khattak [to Balochistan]."

"We are again hoping that the BAP would not do to us what it has been doing for the last three years."

Speaking in the press conference, Bizenjo said Rind was his elder and taking advantage of his experience, the BAP would form a good government in Balochistan together.

"Our aim is not to annoy the allies. We apologise for any inconvenience this may have caused."

Replying to a question, he said that the affairs of Balochistan should not be linked to other provinces and the federation.

By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

The Coming Winter Could be Afghanistan's Bitterest

With both the international community and the Taliban making haste slowly, time is fast running out to reach help to Afghans.



By Haq Nawaz Khan

The harsh Afghan winter is just round the corner but with the country's economy in tatters, the financial system broken down, billion of dollars in Afghan assets abroad frozen, and international community in no hurry to accord diplomatic recognition to their Taliban rulers, the people of the war-ravaged country are in no shape to weather it.

No country is ready to go solo in recognising the Taliban government, with everybody waiting for a broad consensus on the matter to emerge. Many high level meetings have been organised by the international and regional groups to sort out the matter without any success.

In their first direct contact with Taliban representatives in Doha, Qatar since Taliban's rise to power in Afghanistan, US diplomats made amply clear Washington is not in a hurry to recognise the Taliban government.

The resumption of direct contact between the US and the Taliban is a good omen, but the delay in recognising the Kabul government is neither in the interest of the US led international community nor for the Afghanistan.

The renewed US-Taliban talks continued for three days in the Doha, Qatar. Both sides termed the first direct negotiations as positive and held in a cordial atmosphere with a pledge to continue the talks.

In a statement, a State department spokesman Ned Price said the interagency delegation met with senior Taliban representatives in the capital Doha on Saturday and Sunday, their first meeting since the US troop withdrawal from Afghanistan in August.

"The U.S. delegation focused on security and terrorism concerns and safe passage for U.S. citizens, other foreign nationals and our Afghan partners, as well as on human rights, including the meaningful participation of women and girls in all aspects of Afghan society," said Price.

The two sides also discussed the US' provision of robust humanitarian assistance directly to the Afghan people. The US delegation reiterated that "the Taliban will be judged on its actions, not only its words," the statement said.

But who is to be held responsible for the unstable economic situation of the Afghanistan – the US, international community, regional countries or the Taliban itself?

The Taliban leadership has shown little flexibility on many issues, concerning the world. The world is demanding the Taliban to keep its promises, pledged in the Doha Peace Agreement.

According to the peace deal, the US led foreign forces had to leave the Afghan

soil as per the agreed schedule. Not linking the future political government to the troops' withdrawal was a clear message as the critics to the peace described it as, "the US withdrawal deal." In any case, the US has kept its part of the bargain.

The Taliban had promised the future government in Afghanistan would be 'all inclusive' or politically agreed – and the world has seen evidence to the contrary. In a departure from their former position, the Taliban are now saying deciding on a government is an internal matter of Afghanistan.

The acting foreign minister of Afghanistan Amir Khan Muttaqi said as much in his press conference last month, urging the international community to come forward to help Afghanistan. "The pressure tactics should be avoided, as these tactics have not yielded any results in the past," he said.

"We clearly told them that trying to destabilise the government in Afghanistan is good for no one," Muttaqi told Afghan state news agency Bakhtar after the talks with the US delegation in Doha.

The Taliban has repeatedly stated it would not accept members of the previous regime in the government. However, professionals with clean background would be included. The Taliban are insisting they represents all

segments of the Afghanistan. But the international community is still insisting to include people from other ethnic groups as part of the government.

Other issues that restrained the international community to recognise the Taliban government are the protection of human rights, women's role in the government as well as in other spheres of the society, and girls' access to education.

However, there is no progress on these issues as pledged by the Taliban. The Taliban leadership has not come up with a plan for the girls' education, and women's jobs. It is not clear when that plan will be unveiled. Women suffered a lot in the past rule of the Taliban, and the world is worried about a repeat of that episode.

Some countries including Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey, Russia, and China have been lobbying for engagement with the Taliban at the different world levels. The European Union has pledged to provide USD 1 billion in assistance to Afghanistan.

Some 10 countries participated in a Moscow conclave to discuss the current situation in Afghanistan. A Taliban delegation led by the deputy Prime Minister Abdus Salam Hanafi participated in the talks.

The participants of the talks vowed to respect the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Afghanistan, said a joint statement issued at the end of the talks.

In order to obtain official recognition, the Taliban must improve the state management system and form "a truly inclusive government that adequately reflects the interests of all major ethno-political forces in the country," the statement said. "This will be a fundamental prerequisite for the completion of the national reconciliation process in Afghanistan".

Another issue the member countries consider important is that the Taliban pursue a moderate and wise internal and foreign policy, be friendly to Afghanistan's neighbour states, and "achieve the shared goals of durable peace, security, safety, and long-term prosperity and respect the rights of ethnic groups, women, and children."

The Moscow format meeting welcomed the Taliban's "reaffirmed commitment" to

prevent the use of Afghan territory against other states and expressed readiness to provide assistance in fighting terrorist groups residing in Afghanistan, emphasizing that their activities remain a matter of concern for the member countries.

Another reason for concern pointed out in the joint statement is the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Afghanistan.

The Taliban has been asking the US to unfreeze the billions of dollars in Afghan assets that were frozen by the US after the Taliban took over Kabul.

Afghanistan has been mainly relying on the foreign aid for the last four decades. It needs the world support to revive its economy. It needs a medium to long-term economic roadmap to become self-reliant. For now, it is mainly dependent on goods imported from abroad.

The international humanitarian community is pledging to help the people of Afghanistan on the humanitarian grounds and a roadmap for that is under review.

The Taliban has been holding talks with the different countries to resolve the outstanding issues peacefully. A high level delegation has visited Doha, Qatar; Ankara, Turkey; and Moscow, Russia to seek their support in getting their legitimacy.

A high level delegation of the Taliban led by the deputy prime minister Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar and the acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has been holding bilateral talks with the Chinese delegation.

The widespread want and hunger in the absence of a functional economy means any Afghans who can travel at all are leaving the country despite the Taliban assurances, the situation would improve soon.

Thousands of skilled Afghans have already left the country fearing the worst political and economic crisis ahead, and many more are planning to leave. "Our children are asking for food, and there is no work to buy food for them," one Afghan, who fled Afghanistan recently, told The Truth International (TTI).

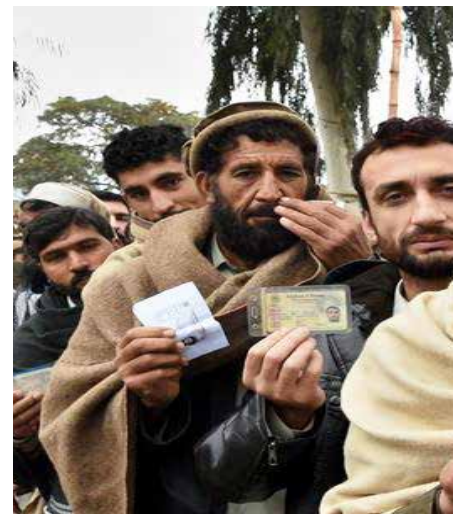
"There was no work and the security situation was also not good. I waited for

weeks expecting there would be the revival of the economic activities, but the situation was going from bad to worse."

Afghan citizens leaving the country seem to be taking the shortest path to an international border crossing point. Some are trickling into Iran in the West, others into Tajikistan in North, and may more into Pakistan through the Torkham and Chaman border crossings.

Pakistan has reopened the Torkham border crossing point, closed since the Taliban's takeover. But it had to be closed as thousands of people reached the Torkham to cross into Pakistan.

The Taliban and Pakistan authorities have asked the people to show patience to avoid any mess. Pakistan has issued some 16,000 visas to Afghan nationals including students, patients, and traders.



Pakistan Ambassador to Afghanistan Mansoor Khan told TTI, "We have reopened the Torkham crossing point for Afghans with valid visas, as it was before the closure. The immigration authorities will only check the passports with visas."

According to some Afghans who have recently reached Pakistan, the Taliban are not stopping the people to leave the country per force, but they are trying to convince them the situation will improve soon.

"We were stopped at every check post by the Taliban," one Afghan refugee in Pakistan said. "They were friendly and asked us why we were leaving? They assured us the situation would soon be better".

The Looming Threat of ISK in Afghanistan

Yesterday's insurgents, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers are finding the shoe is on the other foot.

By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

The Taliban's public denialism about the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK) apart, the new rulers of Afghanistan appear to be waking up to the threat posed by the fanatically puritanical group that has made its presence felt in the war-torn country so soon after the change of guard.

In their private meetings, key Taliban officials acknowledge ISK as their biggest security challenge right now, The Truth International (TTI) can report. A long array of statements by former Afghan soldiers, Northern Alliance, and Hazara fighters have surfaced recently, saying they are joining the ISK.

The concentration and attacks by the ISK in northern Afghanistan have troubled Russia as well as China. Russian President Putin has expressed his concerns in his latest statement. He pointed out the danger and stressed that Afghanistan's neighbours should work together for a stable and peaceful Afghanistan.

"According to our intelligence, the number of (ISIS) members alone in northern

Afghanistan is about 2,000 people," the Russian leader said during a video conference meeting with leaders of other ex-Soviet states.

Pakistani Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi's recent visit to Kabul with DG ISI Faiz Hameed was also in this context.

Afghan Taliban are looking to the Pakistani government, along with Afghanistan's other neighbors, to improve the trade and security situation. Pakistan has recently taken an important step by opening the Pak-Afghan border at Torkham.

Eighty percent of Afghanistan currently depends on the border routes with Pakistan. Not only has this facilitated the Afghan nationals' movement, but it has also boosted trade.

On the flip side, Pakistan is suffering the repercussions of the situation in the Afghan provinces of Nangarhar and Kunar, bordering Pakistan's Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, from the south to the north of KP.

For the past two weeks, the Taliban have

been waging a full-scale campaign against ISK fighters and their facilitators. Sources believe that the exchange of information between Pakistan and Afghanistan has also been clarified for the operation against ISK across the border.

Although some religious circles in Afghanistan are calling it a campaign to target the scholar and followers of the Ahl-e-Hadith school of thought. Pressure on the Afghan Taliban to take action against ISK increased after suicide bombings in Kunduz and Kandahar.

A major battle was fought in Herat city, which the Taliban said was against the kidnappers, but locals confirmed that the eight people killed in the operation were known fighters of ISK.

The presence of ISK in the north of Afghanistan has worried Central Asian states as well as China and Iran. Western media reported about the presence of a Chinese military base in Tajikistan close to Badakhshan province of Afghanistan, which shares a border with China.



Activities at that base by China and Tajikistan have increased since the Kunduz base suicide attack – carried out by an Uyghur Chinese Muslim. In addition, there are large numbers of anti-China Islamic fighters in the Afghan areas bordering China.

Russia has already increased its presence on the Afghan border. Russian and Tajik troops conducted joint drills in October near Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan, as part of efforts to prepare for possible security threats issuing from Afghanistan.

Iran has recently appointed Hassan Kazemi-Ghomi as its special envoy to Afghanistan. Diplomat Hassan Kazmi has long experience in the war in Iraq and later in dealing with ISIS in Iraq.

Referring to ISK, Taliban sources in Kabul said that many ISK fighters are present in the ranks of the Taliban, which is why the Taliban have issued instructions to conduct background checks on their fighters.

Former government sources have even claimed that ISK leader Dr Shahab al-Muhajir himself has taken refuge among the Taliban. The former Afghan officials believe he is an Afghan who studied at the Kabul Polytechnic Institute and his name according to his Afghan voter card is Sanaullah. However, independent sources have denied this.

ISK has made its strategy such that it is not limited to any one region, province or city, but has made its presence felt in almost every major city of the country. The twin suicide blasts in Kandahar were of special significance in this regard as Kandahar is the birthplace of the Taliban.

On the global front, the biggest challenge for the Taliban at the moment is to secure recognition for their government. The international community has not yet recognised them.

A key step before recognising this government is to remove Taliban leaders from the blacklist. It is impossible to accept a government consisting of these leaders, without removing them from the blacklist.

There is no doubt that the Afghan Taliban can fight ISK. Taliban are currently conducting a full-scale operation against ISK with their intelligence-based informa-

tion. The Afghan Taliban's own experience of guerrilla war is coming in handy to deal with the ISK threat.

In their heyday, the Taliban were unmatched in carrying suicide attacks as a war tool. Perhaps with this in mind, Taliban leader Siraj Haqqani held a gathering in Kabul for the families of suicide bombers. He emphasised that the suicide bombers had played a key role in defeating the United States and its allies.

Therefore, the Afghan Taliban are also aware of the war of suicide bombers and obviously, they better know how to deal with it.

But there is another challenge for the Taliban right now and that is their deteriorating economy. Afghanistan's economy is being hit hard by international sanctions.



Until their government has international recognition, the Taliban will continue to face economic problems. The international community has not yet restored their global accounts. Russia has recently demanded that Afghan Taliban leaders be removed from the blacklist.

Not only Pakistan but also other countries in the region are supporting the Afghan Taliban. Neighbouring countries in particular are trying to ease the situation because all neighbouring countries, including Pakistan, agree that without a peaceful Afghanistan, their peace is directly threatened. Even India has begun effective contact with the Afghan Taliban.

Since the country's rapid takeover by the Taliban in mid-August, foreign aid to Afghanistan has almost entirely dried up, leaving the country on the brink of collapse.

Funding from the international community – including the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, foreign governments, and humanitarian agencies – accounted for nearly 75 percent of Afghanistan's public expenditure budget before the Taliban's rise to power.

The healthcare system has been particularly hard hit, with USD 600 million in international healthcare aid now frozen. Most departments do not even have salaries to pay their employees. This is leading to a food crisis.

The world must realise that anti-peace forces in Afghanistan will take advantage of

this situation. Islamic State is one such movement, which is an imminent threat to peace and stability in Afghanistan.

The ISK is running a full-fledged recruitment campaign. They are inviting not only the Afghan Taliban but also former Afghan military personnel to join their rank and files. Experts believe that if not addressed soon, the situation can devolve into chaos which can engulf the whole of Afghanistan.

The world at large in general and neighbouring countries in particular would do well to remember that if left unchecked, the turmoil threatening Afghanistan today could spread to other countries tomorrow.

Uncredible India

On the Afghan imbroglio, India wants to eat its cake and have it too – but what are Pakistan's options?



By Ambassador (R) Abdul Basit President, PICSS, Islamabad

India seems to be in a quandary over Afghanistan. It does not want to be seen hobnobbing with the Taliban for fear of undermining its skewed and self-serving narrative on terrorism. Equally, it does not want to be absent from the table when the time comes to settle the matters concerning Afghanistan.

It was under India's presidency that the United Nations Security Council adopted resolution 2953 on Afghanistan on 30 August 2021. The resolution, on which both China and Russia abstained, set a whole raft of well-known conditions before the international community could formally recognise the Taliban government.

While the world is still insisting on the Taliban to form an "inclusive government", important countries, individually and collectively, have been reaching out to the Taliban to avert a humanitarian crisis in the country with serious domino-effects.

An unstable Afghanistan even under the Taliban can become a safe haven for terrorism, especially the Islamic State-Khorasan which has carried out a number of terror actions since 15 August, the day the Taliban finally took over Kabul.

Not that there has been no contact between Indian and the Taliban. A Taliban representative met the Indian Ambassador in Doha on 31 August – and it was officially acknowledged. It is, however, not clear whether any further meetings took place between the two sides.

Now after many multilateral conclaves on Afghanistan, including the ones by G-20 and Russia, India has also reportedly decided to convene a conference on Afghanistan in New Delhi during the second week of next month.

The conference would be chaired by India's National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval. Interestingly, he has also reportedly invited his Pakistani counterpart to attend the conclave.

It remains to be seen if the Taliban government is also invited to the conference. Although it is highly unlikely that India would allow the Amrullah Saleh cabal to be present at the conference, there is no telling what the Modi-Doval combine might not do to malign Pakistan.

At the ongoing UNGA session, an informal meeting of SAARC foreign ministers could not be held as Pakistan and India differed on who should be representing Afghanistan.

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi in his virtual address at the G-20 meeting stressed that the international community must move in concert on the issue of extending de jure recognition to the Taliban.

Pakistan is yet to respond to the Indian invite. It goes without saying that views in Islamabad are divided. Some analysts are couching their arguments simultaneously in the larger context of regional peace and the need to break the protracted bilateral impasse.

It is being contended that India is a regional player that has been quite active in Afghanistan during the last fifteen years. It has spent over USD 3 billion in over 500 development projects. Accordingly, India's involvement in Afghanistan at this critical juncture would be nothing but salubrious on at least two counts.

Firstly, India can contribute meaningfully in humanitarian assistance that is needed massively and urgently by the people of Afghanistan. Secondly, should Pakistan allow India to transport its assistance overland through the Wagah border, the nuclear rivals will have made history by joining hands to assist a fellow SAARC nation.

As well, this cooperation can potentially nudge the two neighbours towards tacit cooperation to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a sanctuary for terrorists of all denominations.

The other side of the argument is that Pakistan needs to be on guard against being inveigled into an unpropitious situation. India is barely reliable. After what India did to Kashmir on 5 August 2019, Pakistan will be ill-advised to engage with its eastern neighbour even if it involves humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan.

In short, Pakistan should stick to its guns so long as India is unwilling to show some seriousness of purpose apropos of settling the long-standing Kashmir dispute.

Since diplomacy is the art of the possible, Pakistan may craft its response to India's invite along the following lines:

One, Pakistan should insist that it would serve no useful purpose to attend the Delhi conference without the Taliban government being present there.

Two, Pakistan may not attend at the NSA level. Instead, Director General (Afghanistan) or Joint Secretary in the National Security

Division may represent Pakistan. Alternatively, Pakistan's special envoy for Afghanistan may attend. Other invited countries may also prefer to send their respective special representatives for Afghanistan, and not necessarily their national security advisors.

Three, if Islamabad decides to throw caution to the wind and send its NSA to the meeting, it should not be for more than a day trip, and that too without any bilateral engagement on the side-lines of the main event.

There is no doubt Pakistan wants to be as helpful to Afghanistan as possible at this difficult juncture – but it cannot turn a blind eye to New Delhi's grisly human rights violations in occupied Kashmir.

Four, India would definitely prefer the meet to adopt an outcome document in sync with UNSC resolution 2593. The presence of Pakistan along with the Taliban should help keep things in perspective. Setting skewed preconditions for diplomatic recognition is a recipe for complicating the situation. Afghanistan needs a helping hand, not a list of arrogant and illusory demands.

In the meanwhile, Pakistan should be taking serious initiatives of its own. To begin with, an OIC Contact Group, comprising of Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Iran, Turkey, Egypt, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Indonesia could be established to visit Kabul at the earliest opportunity.

The OIC must be in the forefront of providing humanitarian and reconstruction assistance to Afghanistan. The Taliban would likely be more forthcoming and accommodating to the Islamic organization than other plurilateral or multilateral forums.

Interestingly, as well as benefiting the people of Afghanistan, a sustained and meaningful Afghanistan-OIC engagement may also help revive the latter, making it relevant to the myriad challenges facing its 57 members.



Pros and Cons of Deregulating the Fertiliser Sector

A deregulated sector would yield much more revenue to the exchequer – but can farmers buy fertilisers at international market prices?



By Azeem Waqas

Pakistan's fertiliser industry says it is internationally competitive and can thrive in a fully deregulated environment without any subsidy. In fact, some stalwarts of the industry have called for an end to subsidized gas supply and deregulation of the market.

The industry has also asked the federal government to lift the ban on the export of fertilisers because it has a potential of exporting 7 million tons of urea, raking in USD 700 million in foreign exchange, if gas availability is ensured.

The fertiliser industry is being provided gas at subsidized rates. Presently, Fertiliser Sector is being provided gas according to the Fertilisers Policy of 2001 with some players offered PP 2012 and subsidized LNG rates. During the last 10 years, the government has provided subsidy of PKR 339 billion or 270/bag to the farmers.

After deregulation, the industry will be given gas at weighted average cost of gas to all users including indigenous plus imported RLNG.

"After the deregulation, prices of urea in the local market will increase",

Engro Fertilisers Limited CFO Imran Ahmad told The Truth International (TTI). "But the switchover will benefit both farmers and the government in the end".

According to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) prices of fertilisers have already increased by 28.5 percent.

Fertiliser Sector has made a profit of PKR 57 billion during the last one year. DAP ex-Karachi prices began the year around PKR 1,000/50kg bag higher than last year and rose by another PKR 1,100/bag to around PKR 5,500/bag by the end of the period, while they were broadly stable in January-June last year.

The difference to 2020 prices is equivalent to almost USD 260/mt at the current exchange rate. At the same time, DAP import prices were an average USD 216/mt higher this year than in 2020, averaging USD 530/mt CFR in January-June.

Deregulation will impact the farmers who will pay higher prices. Currently, prices of urea are set by industry players at a 75 percent lower than the imported

urea, after deregulation prices of urea will be set on import parity basis. Prices of Urea will go up to PKR 2855 per bag in next five years and in 10 years; prices will be 3166/bag, from the current price 1763/bag.

Local prices of urea remained lower than international prices in the last 10 years mainly because of an indirect subsidy on feedstock gas, which is the primary raw material used in fertiliser manufacture.

Imran Ahmad said that the international market price of urea is equivalent to PKR 7000/bag while in Pakistan it is selling at PKR 1700/bag because government is providing subsidized gas to the fertilisers units.

In other words, the fertilisers plant are passing the benefit to the farmers to the tune of PKR 5000/bag. He said that if the government imports urea from the international market at current prices farmers will bear an additional burden of PKR 363 billion per year.

Fertiliser industry has calculated that if the price of a bag of urea increases by PKR 50, it will have a nominal

inflationary impact and price of Roti will go up by a mere PKR 0.01.

Imran Ahmad says, “After deregulation, the fertiliser sector will be provided gas at par with industrial sector, which will increase the revenue of government by PKR 89 billion”.

About 84 percent of Pakistan’s total fertiliser demand is met through local production while the gap is plugged through imports. The government is giving indirect subsidy to fertiliser sector by offering subsidized input (natural gas) to keep fertiliser prices low.

Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE) has said in its report that the government spends roughly PKR 200 billion every year on subsidizing the fertiliser industry.

Around 80 percent of the gas supplied to the fertiliser industry is for feedstock. A differential of PKR 721 per million cubic BTU (British thermal units) exists between feedstock and fuel stock prices. The government also provides a subsidy of PKR 1,194 per 50kg bag on imported urea.

The retail price of a 50kg urea bag was PKR 1,686 in 2020-21 after a subsidy of PKR 865 per bag on feedstock gas. About 65 percent of the retail price (PKR 1,096 per bag) constituted the cost of production while the remaining 35 percent (PKR 590) was the profit that was divided among different stakeholders, including production units, the PIDE paper said.

However, if the subsidy on feedstock gas amounting to PKR 865 per bag was to be withdrawn, the selling price of urea would soar to PKR 2,551 per bag.

Imran Ahmad said that around 90 percent of the farmers have 12.5 acre land so the government can provide a targeted subsidy of PKR 65 billion through Kisan Cards to them.

Major fertiliser companies in Pakistan increased their profits in the first half of 2021 compared with 2020, as higher fertiliser prices raised margins.

Profits after tax of companies Engro, Fauji, and Fauji’s FFBL subsidiary rose year-on-year, with Engro more than doubling its earnings over the period. Engro’s fertiliser division reported profits of 10.5 billion rupees (USD 63.9 million) for January-June, compared with PKR 4.5 billion in the first half of 2020. Gross profits rose by 53 percent over the period to PKR 21.4 billion.

Fauji’s (FFC) fertiliser division achieved overall profits after tax of PKR 11.6 billion in the first half, up by 18 percent year-on-year.

The firm’s FFBL subsidiary, which operates a DAP and urea plant in southern Pakistan, posted profits of PKR 1.9 billion, compared with a loss of PKR 3.2 billion in the first half of 2020. FFBL’s profits turned positive in the third quarter of 2020 after several years of losses.

Executive Director of Fertiliser Manufacturers of Pakistan Advisory Council (FMPAC), Brig (R) Sher Shah Malik said: “Theoretically, the proposal of deregulating Fertiliser industry is fine but practically it is difficult to implement it until the government creates a mechanism of targeted subsidy for the farmers”.

Malik further said: “Farmers cannot afford urea at import price. The government has to make a robust and efficient plan of targeted subsidy for them”.

He said that some quarters accuse the fertiliser sector of flexing its muscle to benefit from around PKR 200 billion in subsidies every year. It is a great fallacy that the fertiliser industry is a major beneficiary of subsidies that are intended to keep the prices of essential food commodities at an affordable level.

Sher Shah Malik asserted: “In the Covid-19 era, this self-sufficiency has meant that farmers in Pakistan enjoyed abundant and affordable urea supplies at around 60 percent cheaper prices (PKR 1768/bag) compared to the global market (PKR 4500/bag”.

He said contrary to the global trend, urea prices in Pakistan have remained stable this year and hover around 2012 levels. It must be well acknowledged that the fertiliser sector has passed on 2.4 times the benefit – amounting to PKR 122 billion this year alone so far and more than PKR 600 billion over the last decade – to farmers in the form of lower urea prices as compared to the gas subsidy received on feedstock, he added.

FMPAC, is of the view that the fertiliser industry is burdened with high borrowing costs and cash flow challenges as the government has accumulated around PKR 60 billion in outstanding GST refunds and subsidies since 2016. As a result, the industry’s investment and upgradation plans are likely to be compromised, which does not bode well for national food security and economic development.



Pharma Sector Has Huge Export Potential, says Arshad Mehmood

Q&A with the head of Pakistan's fastest growing pharmaceutical group.

Mr Arshad Mehmood is the Group Managing Director of W Group of Industries, a conglomerate of a dozen pharmaceuticals manufacturing units in the Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa provinces of Pakistan.

The Group received the "Fastest Growing Pharmaceutical Group" award by Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar on 29 September 2021. Earlier, it was awarded an Export Trophy by Federal Minister for Commerce Mr Abdul Razak Dawood.

Here is a question and answer session with Mr Mehmood on how Pakistan's pharma sector is doing, and how it could do better.

Q: What is pharmaceutical industry and how Pharmaceutical business is going on in Pakistan?

A: Pharmaceuticals is a 5 billion dollar industry of Pakistan while the international market size of pharma industry is 1,800 billion dollars, so the sector has huge export potential.

Current export of this sector is only 250 million dollars. India's current pharmaceuticals exports are around 22 billion dollars. This is due to the attractive, excellent, and supportive vision and policies of the Indian government for this sector. International pharmaceuticals market annually growing at the rate of 9 percent.

Pharmaceutical business in Pakistan is the only business that has extreme controls implemented by the government. Strict government regulations control the business from licensing to manufacturing to import and export. Even the prices of the drugs are controlled by the government. Unfortunately, the inputs have no control by the government thus the business is always gasping for some breath to survive.

Q: What are some of the challenges facing this sector?

A: As I just explained, the pharmaceutical sector is Pakistan's most heavily regulated. The biggest challenge facing industry are the discretionary powers of the officials in implementation of those regulations. Another challenge stems from the fact that almost no active material is produced in Pakistan.

The government has paid no attention to fostering a favourable policy regime that would help our industry compete with India and China. The upshot is that we resort to imports to meet 98 percent of our active pharmaceutical ingredient (API) needs.

A related problem is that our unstable relations with India often prevent us from accessing one of the world's cheapest API export market. Together, all these factors have a huge impact on the supply chain of our local pharmaceutical industry.

Q: The government claims to give many incentives to this sector. Are you satisfied with these incentives?

A. Well, a number of meetings have been held between industry and the government and the industry has put forward the issues it is



facing and the government has promised to provide all possible support in resolving those issues. We are highly satisfied that the Prime Minister realises the importance of the pharmaceutical industry and he has made it a priority to promote the exports of locally manufactured pharmaceuticals.

Q: It is felt that prices of medicines are very high in Pakistan? How do you respond to this?

A: This perception is completely mistaken. Apart from Pakistan, there are very few countries around the world that control drug prices. Among those countries are Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India.

Now not all drugs are price controlled in India and Bangladesh. But in Pakistan, every drug is price controlled including many non-drugs that were somehow registered as drugs and are still not allowed to be shifted to the Health and OTC division. Such products include Ginseng, Vicks balm, etc.

Q: What is role of the Drug Regulatory Authority of Pakistan or DRAP?

A: DRAP was established to regulate the therapeutic goods (medicines, medical devices & alternate medicines) in the areas of quality, safety, and efficacy. The role of DRAP as mandated by the statute is very positive in development of local pharmaceutical industry in Pakistan.

However, we feel DRAP has a tendency to interfere with the industry beyond its mandate. Some of their actions are tantamount to control of business that include contract manufacturing between two license holders. They even assert control over business margins, exports, etc., which is way out of line.

The role of DRAP needs be limited to its mandate. It should not try to control the business side of our operations. In medical devices, DRAP has put restrictions on indenting, which amounts to control of business.

Q: Spurious medicines are an issue in Pakistan? How can be handled?

A: Spurious medicines are a problem across the globe. Many countries are facing this issue. The biggest hubs of spurious drug production are India and China, whereas Pakistan has very few reports of spurious drug manufacturers. The proportion of all spurious drugs detected by government labs comes to a mere 0.4 percent. So the impression that spurious drugs are commonplace in Pakistan is incorrect.

Q: In some countries, the physicians write prescriptions for generic medicine instead of writing out name brand medicine manufactured by particular companies. Should Pakistan embrace that model?

A: This is a practice across the world that doctors prescribe medicines according to the disease of the patient. Choosing the brand is the prerogative of the doctor that is based on his or her experience and trust. Nothing unusual is being practiced in Pakistan and it should remain as such.

Q: From where are pharmaceutical companies importing salts for use in medicine manufacturing?

A: Salts or API are manufactured in different countries but the cost of API is high if imported from EU or the US. The Pakistani industry sources most of its inputs from the economical markets of China and India.

Q: Should the government allow to import salts from India?

A: The best thing would be to manufacture API in Pakistan, and we

call upon the government to give incentives for local production of API. However, until that happens, import of critical inputs from India should be allowed.

Q: What is the role of a drug inspector? Is it effective? What do you say about this?

A: The role of drug inspectors is important in assuring quality of drugs in the market. However, currently some drug inspectors tend to assume the role of police and not that of a facilitator for the industry. Their attitude should be changed to facilitate the industry and guide them in improving the manufacturing instead of treating the industry as criminals.

W Group of Companies' Units

1. Weather Folds Pharmaceuticals, Hattar, Pakistan
2. Welwrd Pharmaceuticals, Hattar, Pakistan
3. WnsFeild Pharmaceuticals, Hattar, Pakistan
4. Winbrains Research Labs, Hattar, Pakistan
5. Winbrains Research Labs (Semi basic manufacturing), Hattar, Pakistan
6. Welmark Pharmaceuticals, Hattar, Pakistan
7. Weather Folds Nutraceutical, Hattar, Pakistan
8. Wenovo Pharmaceuticals Plant, Taxila, Punjab, Pakistan
9. Wezen Pharmaceutical, Islamabad, Pakistan
10. Welwink Pharmaceuticals, Gujranwala, Pakistan
11. Wallace Pharma Evolution, Lahore, Pakistan
12. Wallesely Pharmaceuticals Plant, Taxila, Punjab, Pakistan



A Season for Change

Is PM Imran Khan about to discover what a fickle mistress political power is?

By Asadullah

As Islamabad sheds its green summer livery for its glorious yellow and ochre autumn garb, the country's politics also looks set to transition to a new season. There are clues aplenty that the recent faceoff between Prime Minister Imran Khan and the military chief over the appointment of Director General Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI) is going to be a watershed moment for Mr Khan and his cohorts.

The going has been easy and things hunky-dory for the Khan-led political dispensation up until now, already past the halfway mark of its constitutionally mandated term, with the media giving the government a free pass and the judiciary taking a placid view of several cases against key government figures including Khan himself.

All that, however, is set to change now.

Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) government has effectively defanged the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) by bringing in a Presidential Ordinance that bars the feared watchdog from going after top public functionaries – at least for the time being.

Interestingly, some opposition lawmakers are also string to exact some benefit from the National Accountability Ordinance (NAO), opposed by their parties as a new NRO – in a reference to the notorious Musharraf era law instituted to drop criminal charges against scores of co-opted politicians from the PPP and MQM parties ahead of the 2008 General Election.

However, it appears that top political leadership might not be getting benefit from this so called NRO since Prime Minister Imran Khan is facing a case of attacking Parliament House in the Anti-Terrorism Court (ATC) of Islamabad, registered against him under the Anti-Terrorism Act (ATA).

Besides Mr Khan, all the leadership of the PTI including incumbent President Dr Arif Alvi had been nominated as accused in this

case in the First Information Report (FIR) registered in Sept 2014 during PTI's sit-in at the Constitution Avenue.

He was though probed under the NAO in couple of cases in the past including for utilizing official helicopter of KP government. However, the inquiries were scrapped before these were upgraded into the investigation.

A serious case, which may have consequences for Mr Khan and the entire PTI is the foreign funding case.

The foreign funding case against the PTI has dragged on for years. The case pertains to a complaint by Akbar S. Babar, one of the founding members of the PTI, in which he has accused the party of acquiring illegal funding.

The case is being heard by the Election Commission of Pakistan which is the relevant authority to decide whether the PTI stands guilty as charged. The ECP had appointed a scrutiny committee to go over all the relevant documents and determine if the case could actually be proved against the PTI.

The cases against the leadership of Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) including former President Asif Ali Zardari are said to fall within the ambit of the amended ordinance. In fact, PPP's legal wizard Farooq H Naek has already started filing application before the accountability courts for transfer of the pending trial to the courts of competent jurisdiction.

However, PML-N stalwarts like Shahid Khaqan Abbasi and Ahsan Iqbal appear to be less interested in getting benefit of the new law, although they may yet benefit from the amended provisions.

However, the new law offers no reprieve to the PML-N's supreme leader Nawaz Sharif.

On the other hand, the amendment has toughened the definition of "Assets" that was the reason for Mr Sharif's ouster from the office of the Prime Minister, his

disqualification and ultimately his conviction.

In the coming month, NAB is expected to step up its fight against Mr Sharif's acquittal in the Flagship reference.

It may be mentioned that the Supreme Court hearing the Panama Papers case constituted a Joint Investigation Team (JIT) and upon receipt of the JIT's report, disqualified Mr Sharif from holding public office and ordered NAB to file three references against Sharif family.

Mr Sharif was convicted in Avenfield Apartment and Al-Azizia references. He was however acquitted in the Flagship Investment reference.

Likewise, the President PML-N Shahbaz Sharif is also facing the cases related to his assets and against his administrative decisions. Since, he has always shown allegiance to the power corridors, therefore, he is not facing hostile prosecution.

The case of Maryam Nawaz on the other hand, is also being zealously pursued. Prosecution of NAB has filed multiple application seeking day to day trial and cancellation of her bail granted her in Avenfield Apartment reference.

Maryam Nawaz, along with her father Nawaz Sharif and spouse Capt (R) Safdar, was convicted in Avenfield Apartment reference on July 06, 2018, days before the General Elections 2018.

She is taking on Gen Faiz head-on as her recent petition accused the spymaster of manipulating the elections through what she calls a trumped up conviction of her father and herself days before the 2018 General Election.

NAB has accused her of being beneficial owner of the Avenfield Apartment and presenting a forged trust deed before the Supreme Court. IHC will decide the fate of the accusation of submitting trust deed while deciding her main appeal against her conviction in the Avenfield Apartment reference.

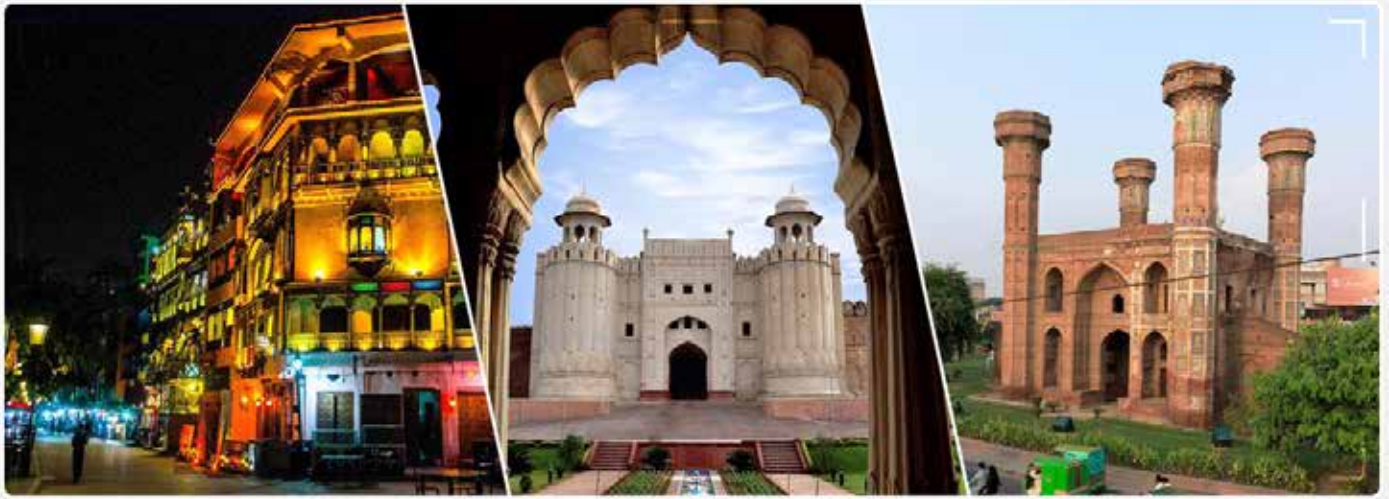
CandyLand

HAR PAKISTANI KI JAAN MAIN MILI!



Lahore's Glorious Past is Crumbling in Plain Sight

Somebody tell our mandarins money spent preserving our heritage is money well spent.



By Zainab Umer

You would almost think Lahore is all greasy food, loud rickshaws, and 76.59 percent air pollution. But then there are things of timeless beauty from the city's storied past scattered all around us in the form of majestic buildings of a myriad forms from the Badshahi Mosque to the Sheesh Mahal of Lahore Fort.

Historic buildings are memorials of human activity and serve as a link with the past. They are a trust and it is the duty of the present generation to ensure that they are passed on to posterity without their authenticity being impaired or their essential scheme of aesthetics and setting being altered.

Unfortunately, such buildings are found more or less in disrepair. These sites tell Lahore's story and require a substantial amount of care. Despite knowing how important historical sites are for the present and the link to the past for Pakistan, there is little to no maintenance of these sites. No initiatives are taken for the reconstruction, renovation or repair of these sites.

Take for example the Shahi Qila. A visit to this exquisite piece of architecture could be quite depressing as the Fort is in dire need of repair and restoration. Although the Qila's lawns are decorated beautifully, there is still a lot of room for improvement.

During their long reign, the Mughal rulers of Lahore built a wall with twelve gates to protect the city from enemy attacks. Some of these collapsed over time. Out of the twelve gates, colloquially known as Darwazas, of Lahore and one mori (drain), only one Roshnai gate remains in its original condition today. The other Darwazas – Mochi, Lohari, Shah Alami, Kashmiri, Delhi, Akbari, Bhati, Masti, Taksali, Sheeranwala, and Yaki – are still there but in dire need of attention.

Historical sites like the Shahi Qila, the Sheesh Mahal are all open for public visitation. Due to the utter inadequacy of the official stewardship and irresponsible attitude of the visiting throngs, these places are enduring the worst kinds of littering and pollution.

The government of Punjab needs to do something about the issue. We need to preserve these buildings in their original form and proper condition not only for coming generations but also for the preservation of our culture and history.

National heritage is 'anything of national significance which is handed down and preserved through generations especially, architecture, landscapes, documents, and other artifacts'.

Each of us has parts of the past that connect us to the future. Old photographs, turned sepia. The old pandan (betel-box) that a grandmother used. A family house holding wonderful memories. A piece of jewellery passed down from one generation to the next.

Whatever we treasure, a part of our past is part of our heritage. It's not just personal heritage that is important. National heritage holds equal amounts of importance as it links us as a community to the past, present and the future.

Though the National Archaeological Department has traditionally been responsible for preserving these sites, it is upon every Pakistani to do their share in ensuring the sites are not damaged or polluted in any manner by their visits.

The authorities would do well to undertake urgent measure to mend the situation. First, there needs to be a special team that is always present in public parks and buildings to look after public property. Second, anyone found littering and polluting these historical sites should be fined a hefty amount on the spot. Third, the government should run an awareness campaign among the citizens for a litter-free and beautiful historical Lahore.

It is hoped the government of Punjab and its Archaeology Department will consider this important issue and will do some repairs to the Shahi Qila as well as to all the historical buildings of Punjab so that our coming generation are not deprived of the opportunity these buildings offer to stay in touch with our past.



Experts believe that Lahore is losing its heritage to the hands of capitalism in the form of plazas, large stores, and warehouses for clothing, footwear, electronics, and utensils.

In the past, the inner city was a sight to behold and a great tourist destination for people from all over the world because of these historic buildings, beautiful Mughal era gates, and unique architecture. But now, much of the area is lined with broken roads, street encroachments, and chaotic traffic.

According to statistics reported by the Express Tribune, 1,003 buildings in the inner city are classified as dangerous. More than 500 of the 1,003 hazardous buildings, the Walled City of Lahore Authority says, are on the verge of collapse.

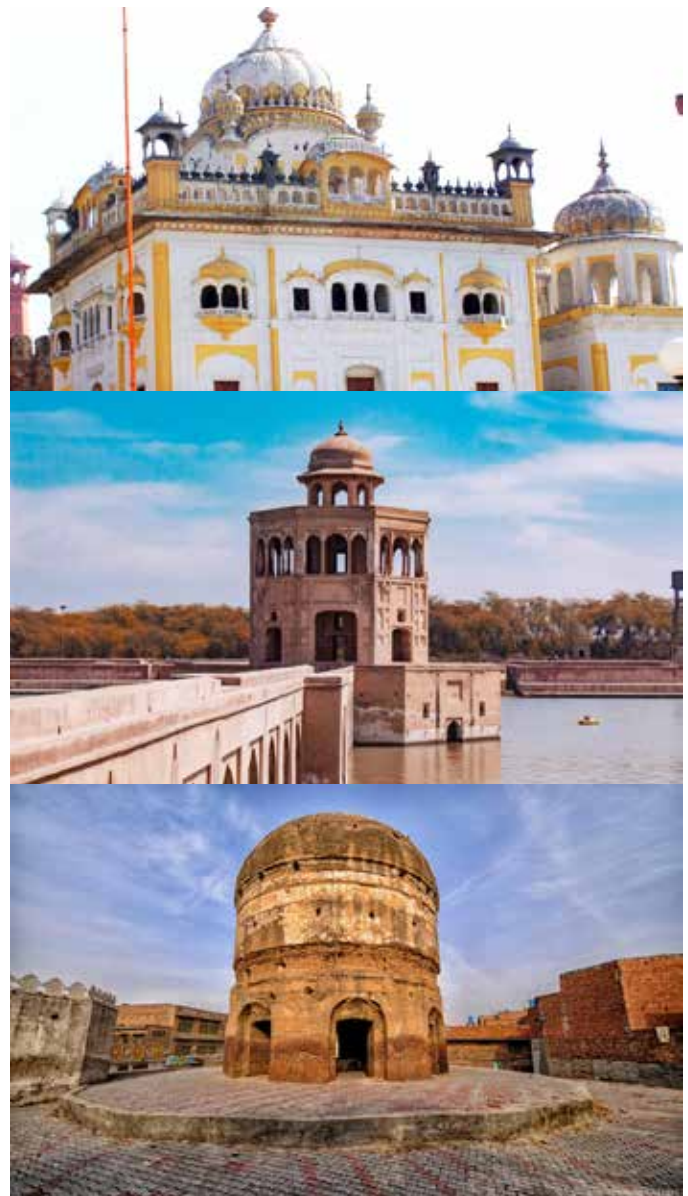
Under the old city restoration plan by the Walled City of Lahore Authority, a body has been given the responsibility for the conservation, planning and development of these sites. Work has been ongoing for the last few years only on the royal corridor from Delhi Gate to the Royal Fort.

While the provincial administration has dished out more than PKR 210 million for renovations, the inner city of Lahore awaits a desperate cash injection to preserve what remains of its history.

When asked about the status of these sites, chief minister's adviser on tourism Asif Mehmood said that the biggest problem at hand in archaeological and cultural heritage restoration was the paucity of funding.

Prime Minister Imran Khan has said his government is committed to preserve and restore all historical sites in the country. In a tweet, he said Lahore Fort has been restored and preserved for future generations of Pakistan.

He is on the money: It is of great importance that we preserve and restore the essence of Lahore's history so that the future generations of Pakistan are able to form links to their past and their national heritage. Only, the authorities need to realise is that money spent on preservation of our heritage is money well spent.



Zamzama: A Marvel from a Bygone Era

More than two centuries after it sang its last song, the artillery piece from the past lives on to tell the tale.



By Muhammad Zahid Rifat

On a raised platform on Shahrah-e-Quaid-i-Azam (the Mall Road) in Lahore between Punjab University (Old Campus) and the Museum is placed the famous Zamzama Gun which is also known as Bhangian Wali Tope and Kim's Gun.

The name Zamzama was given to this gun when it was cast. Literally, the meaning of Zamzama is "hammer" or "applauder" but the word also means a "lion's roar".

It is known as Bhangian Ki Top or Bhangiann Wali Tope after the name of Hari Singh Bhangi who made war on Khwaja Obaid and captured it in 1762 AD.

According to Rudyard Kipling, an English lad Kim used to play on the platform which was further adorned for placing the gun, so he had called it "Kim's Gun".

Hundreds of thousands people pass it every day but not many have ever bothered to know about its history which is, quite interestingly, inscribed in Persian around its muzzle and further up around the middle of the barrel. The inscriptions include its date of manufacture, names of the monarchs and the technicians along with verses in Persian were moulded with floral patterns.

Around the muzzle it is inscribed: By order of the Emperor Durri Dowran Shah Wali Khan, the Wazir made this gun, named Zamzama, the capturer of strongholds, the work of Shah Nazir.

On the back of the gun in the middle is the following inscription:

In the reign of the King possessing dignity like Faredun,
Dispenser of justice, robed in equity.
The pearl of the age, Ahmad Shah,
King, the conqueror of thrones, dignified as Jamshed,
An order was issued to the grand Wazir,
From the threshold of his Majesty,
To have cast with every possible skill,
A gun terrible as a dragon and huge as a mountain,
His heaven enthroned Majesty's servant,
Shah Wali Khan, the minister of affairs,
In order to accomplish that grand enterprise,
Called together a number of master workmen,
Till, with consummate toil,
Was cast this wonderful gun Zamzama.
The destroyer even of the strongest of heaven
Has at last appeared under the auspices of His Majesty,
I enquired of reason for the date of this gun;
Reason, struck with terror, replied:
"If thou wilt give thy life in payment,
I will disclose to these the secret".
I agreed, and he replied;
"What a gun; a weapon like a fire raining dragon".

Zamzama gun is 14 feet 4 ½ inches in length, exclusive of the casemate, the aperture of the bore being 9 ½ inches. It was placed in this position on the occasion of the visit of Duke of Edinburgh to Lahore in February 1870. This ancient piece of ordnance, one of the largest specimens of casting in India, was cast at Lahore, with another gun of the same size, in 1757 AD by Shah Nazir, under the directions of Shah Wali Khan, Prime Minister of the Abdali King Ahmad Shah Durrani.

It is made of copper and brass obtained by jazia (capitation tax levied by Muslims from infidels), a metal vessel having been taken from each Hindu house in Lahore. Ahmad Shah used it in the famous battle of Panipat in 1761.

After the battle, on his way back to Kabul, he left it in Lahore with his Governor Khwaja Ubed, as the carriage for it to Kabul was not ready. The other gun he took along, but it was lost in passage through Chenab.

In 1762, Hari Singh Bhangi made war on Khwaja Ubed and attacked him in the village of Khwaja Said, two miles from Lahore (now within Lahore), where the Mughul Governor had his arsenal, and seized his artillery, arms and ammunition.

Among the artillery pieces captured on this occasion, Zamzama thenceforward came to be called the Bhangi's tope. After that it remained with Sukerchakias, Chathas and Ranjit Singh who used it for different campaigns of Daska, Kasur, Wazirabad and Multan.

In 1818, it was declared unserviceable and placed at Delhi Gate until 1870, when it was moved to the present location.

On the fall of Lahore in 1764, Lehna Singh and Gujjar Singh Bhangi seized Zamzama from Shah Burj where it lay unmounted.

Between 1764 and 1772, Sukerchakia chief carried it first to his

camp and then to his fort at Gujranwala. It was subsequently captured by Chathas who carried it to Ahmed Nagar near Wazirabad.

The Chathas who were always fighting with Sukerchakias recovered it in 1772 and then removed it to Rasul Nagar, then known as Ram Nagar. Sardar Jhanda Singh Bhangi having captured it in the following year, after his return from Multan, carried it to Amritsar where it remained in Bhangi fort till 1802.

In 1802, Ranjit Singh had expelled Bhangis from Amritsar and taken over its possession. Ranjit Singh employed it in his campaigns of Daska, Kasur, Sujjan Pur, Wazirabad and Multan.

By 1818, the gun became so dilapidated it was declared beyond repair and placed at Delhi Gate in Lahore.

After the first Sikh war, it was handed over to the British as part of a subsidiary treaty signed at Lahore on 6 March 1846 between the British and the Sikh State. Also under the treaty, at the earnest solicitation of the Sikh Darbar, the Governor General consented to leave a British force in garrison in Lahore for the reorganization of the Sikh army.

In 1870, it was placed on the Mall Road in front of the Lahore Museum and the Punjab University (Old Campus) on the occasion of visit of His Royal Highness the Duke of Edinburgh to Lahore in February 1870.

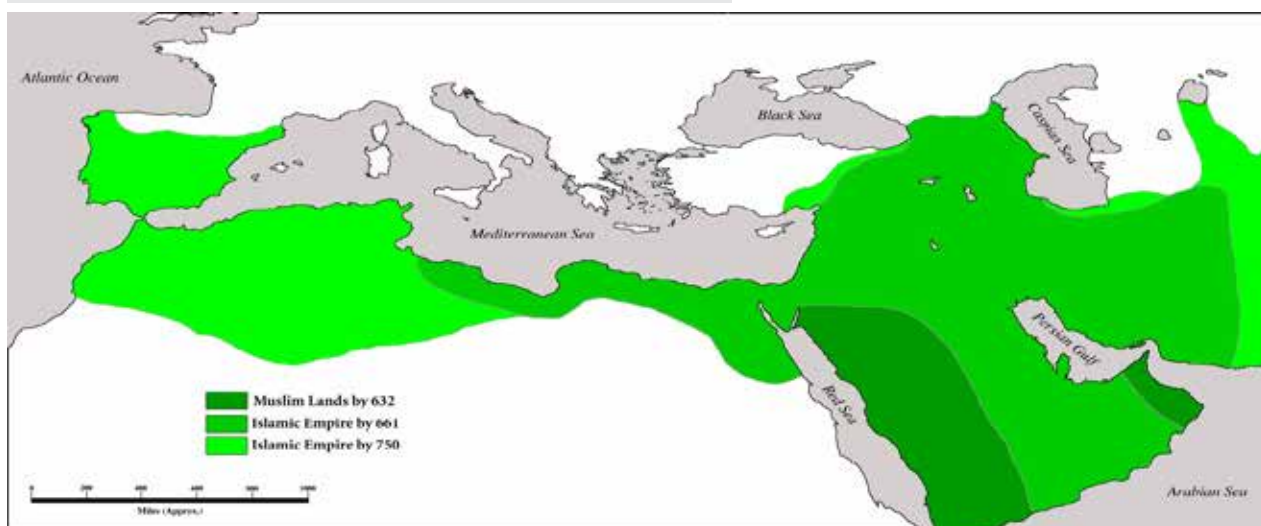
The Zamzama Gun has not roared since then and is lying silently looking over the passers-by who have little inkling of its historic significance.

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Caliphates and Sultanates of Muslims

A survey of varying Christian perspectives of the end times.



By Azmat M Saqib

It is a matter of great astonishment that despite the fact that Muslim civilization remained a dominant civilization for more than twelve centuries, from Morocco to Indonesia from Central Africa to Russia its followers contributed in improving the lot of humanity. Yet, present day Muslims throughout the world considers their past as dark and shameful. They consider the caliphs and sultans as lustful Harem dwellers, Tyrants, killers and enemy of intellectual scholarship.

Without giving much thought, history of Islamic world is considered similar to European Christian history of dark and middle ages. Little do they know that European Renaissance was heralded by scholars who had been educated at Muslim Spain and Baghdad? Christians and Jews at these centers were highly placed and contributed positively in government and intellectual institutions.

The domain of Islamic system and its political model is spiritual and material, eternal and temporal, this worldly and other worldly, and last but not the least Godly and humanly. Islamic system based society harmonized all the above mentioned aspects in a manner that the Creator and His creation (both human and other creations) embody unity of purpose (Tawhid), i.e., to accept that Allah, the Creator, only has the right to legislate, the creation can only work within the limits set by him. If man acts as his vicegerent (caliph) on earth and makes a governance system within the legislated limits, then harmony is achieved between the Creator and creation.

After the departure of Prophet Muhammad Peace be upon him (pbuh) from this world, Caliphate of Rashidun (Abu Baker, Umar, Usman, Ali, may Allah be pleased with them) was similar to the rule of Saul, David and Solomon (peace be upon them). Except that the lifestyle of Rashidun Caliphs as that of an average Muslim subject. Christians were deprived of that governance system when Saint Paul suspended the law given by Torah and Talmud for the Gentiles, thus

Emperor Constantine of Byzantine Empire was not bound by Mosaic Law, and Christianity spread without any temporal governance system at its back. Islamic Caliphates started immediately after the departure of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), whereas divinely inspired kingdoms of Prophets Saul, David and Salomon reigned after 250 years of Moses' death.

In this article, a brief review of Muslim caliphates and famous sultanates will be presented. After the conquest of Mecca in 630 AD, Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) was the Caliph of Allah over Arabian Peninsula for two years before he departed from this world. Caliphate of Rashidun reigned for thirty years as predicted by Prophet Muhammad's (pbuh) hadith, i.e. from 632 to 661. Caliphs in chronological order were Abu Baker, Umar, Usman, Ali bin Abi Talib, Hassan bin Ali (may Allah be pleased with them). Caliphate of Ali was challenged by Governor of As-Sham present day Syria, and remained autonomous during Caliph Ali's four and a half year rule.



Fifth Caliph designate Hassan bin Ali abdicated in favor of Amir Muawiya bin Abi Sufiyan after losing several battles, so that peace prevails among Muslims. At the end of Rashidun era half of North African coastal regions, Levant, and Southeastern Anatolia came under Muslims.

When Amir Muawiya bin Abi Sufiyan, took oath of allegiance from Muslims for his son Yazid as future Caliph,

he departed from Islamic principle of Caliphate and converted it into a hereditary process. Thus institution of Caliphate was compromised to a hereditary nomination. Although sharia (Islamic law) prevailed under dynastic Caliphate, but certain political principles were compromised at highest level of governance. Amir Muawiya thus founded the Umayyad Caliphate which lasted from 661 AD till 750 AD. In addition to the Rashidun era annexation, by the end of Umayyad dynasty, all of the North Africa coastal states, Morocco and Iberian Peninsula came under Muslim rule. From Mediterranean Sea till Western Pakistan region and all the central Asians states including Afghanistan also came under Muslim rule.

In 750 AD Abbasid Clan, descendants of Abbas bin Abdul Muttalib, uncle and companion of Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) overthrew the Umayyad rule and took over Caliphate. Their rule was also hereditary. Under caliph Haroon Ur Rashid and Mamoon Ur Rashid, Baghdad reached its zenith of progress and center of intellectual learning of the world.



It is worth nothing that Umayyad dynasty persecuted the Clan of Hashem, especially the supporters of Hussain bin Ali in Medina and Abdullah bin Zubair (grandson of Abu Bakr) in Mecca. Both stood against the hereditary transfer of Caliphate to Yazid bin Muawiya. In turn, when Clan of Abbas took over, they persecuted the notables of Umayyad clan. Yet in both the dynasties, there were rulers who were just, notably, Caliph Umar bin Abdul Aziz of Umayyad dynasty.

Despite these politically motivated persecutions, governance system was progressing, peace was prevalent across Muslim lands, people became prosperous and conquered subjects fared better under Muslim rule than their previous overlords who extracted very high taxes, especially from formers. Even the slaves from the conquests, rose to high position in the caliphs' Special Forces. Some intelligent female slaves even became mothers of future rulers.

The Abbasids peak, also of Muslim civilization, occurred during the period 786-861 AD. Intellectually, militarily, and governance wise they were the world leaders. Later due to infightings and autonomous rulers, the Caliphate went in decline. Buyids, a Shia Iranian dynasty, which mainly ruled over Iraq and central and southern Iran from 934 to 1062, took over Baghdad. But in 1055, Seljuk General Tughrul under commission from Abbasid Caliph defeated Buyids. Earlier Seljuk Turks swept over central Asia, Afghanistan, Iran, and Eastern Anatolia even Baghdad for a short time. Seljuks were Turk-Persian Sunni in origin and their court language was Persian. They became "defenders of the faith" on

behalf of weakened Abbasid Caliphate. The Seljuk dynasty's decline came at the end of 11th century, due to infighting among heirs ruling different regions; hence the first crusaders from Christian Europe were able to penetrate into Syrian regions. The Seljuk Empire was divided into states in the 12th century; one was ruled by Seljuks and the other by Mamluks (a military caste of former Turk, Kurd and Circassia slaves). The Mamluks occupied Egypt and the holy land until the ottomans took over. The Seljuk dynasty ended with the invasion of the Mongols in 1243. Anatolia surrendered and become a vassal state of the Mongols. In 1258, Hulegu Khan's Mongol horsemen ransacked Baghdad and ruthlessly killed the Abbasid Caliph Al-Musta'sim.

Earlier, from tenth to twelfth centuries an area including present day Algeria, Tunisia, Sicily, Egypt and Syria came under the rule of the Fatimid dynasty (909-1171 AD), Ismaili offshoot of Shia sect from north Africa. Their last Caliph died in 1171. Saladin (Salah-ud-din-Ayubi) a vizier in the Fatimid Caliphate became the ruler of Egypt; he realigned Egypt back under Abbasid Caliphate. But in 1241 the last Ayubi sultan was overthrown by Mamluk General and Mamluk dynasty became the next rulers of Egypt and Syria till their defeat by ottoman Turks in 1517.

Ghaznavi dynasty (977 to 1186 AD) ruled at its greatest extent, large parts of Iran, Afghanistan, much of Transoxiana (lower Central Asia) and the northwest Indian subcontinent. Sultan Mahmud of Ghazna's father Subuktigin was a freed Turkish slave, became a general, and upon his father-in-law's death became the ruler at Ghazi, Afghanistan. Their strong Sultanate was under suzerainty of Abbasid Caliphate.



In the mid of fourteenth century rose a ruler, Amir Taimur the lame, a Turk, whose war tactics were similar to Genghis Khan. He struck terror in his enemies by executing massacres (killing hundreds of thousands) and destroyed any city which resisted his advance. Due to his terror many non-Muslims were forced to convert to Islam. His rule extended from Levant at the Mediterranean coast, Syria, eastern Anatolia, Iraq, Persia, Georgia, central Asia, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India till Delhi. Samarqand was his capital and after his death in 1405 AD, his Empire was divided among his sons and weakened.

Another region of significance was the Iberian Peninsula. In 711, Muslim forces invaded and in seven years conquered the Peninsula. It became one of the great Muslim civilizations; reaching its summit with the Umayyad Caliphate of Cordoba. Muslim rule ended in 1492 when Grenada was conquered.

Andalusia Caliphate, Ottoman Caliphate and Muslim rule in Indian subcontinent and beyond will be dealt with in the next article.

TO BE CONTINUED.....

Tough Love in Pak-IMF Relationship

The parties agree on the necessity of the agreed reforms, but the Fund wants them now.



By Mehtab Haider

Pakistan's scramble for a staff-level deal with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) seems to be getting nowhere as the two sides remain deadlocked, unable to bridge their differences of opinion – even though Pakistan has agreed to jack up energy and utility prices.

A staff-level agreement is a prerequisite to signing a fresh Memorandum of Financial and Economic Policies (MEFP) for the USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) approved by the Executive Board on July 2019.

Advisor to PM on Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin cancelled his scheduled visit to London to extend his stay in the United States and but an agreement could not be reached within the stipulated timeframe.

At a time when Pakistan and the IMF were holding parleys to accomplish the 6th review under EFF, Islamabad hiked petrol and diesel prices by PKR 10 to PKR 12 per litre respectively and raised electricity tariff by PKR 1.39 per unit. None of this, however, could placate the IMF, clearly intent on playing hardball with Pakistan this time.

Among the last remaining sticking point seems to be how to pace the putative reform measures, chiefly comprising of adjustments on fiscal, monetary, and exchange rate fronts. The IMF staff insist on all conditions being met upfront within the current fiscal while the Pakistani side is pushing for a more graduated approach.

Apparently, the Fund is wary the government may abandon the program after drawing the current tranche of the facility instead of pushing through with the agreed reform in view of the coming general election.

The next fiscal year (2022-23) coincides with the last year of the constitutional term of the incumbent government. Expecting that a government beholden to the ballot would steer clear of political expediency in an election year would simply be expecting too much.

Now both Pakistan and the IMF keep saying they are inching closer to a staff-level agreement for completion of the 6th review, but so far the parleys being held at Washington DC have remained inconclusive as of the filing of this report.

Top Ministry of Finance officials are confident an agreement could be struck anytime as the two sides have achieved agreement on 99 percentage points – but they are wary of giving any timeframe for the agreement.

The IMF did share a draft of MEFP having tables one to nine so evolving consensus on the pace of adjustments would pave the way for a staff-level agreement between the IMF and Pakistani side.

Another point of contention between Pakistan and the Fund is the implementation of the Treasury Single Account to consolidate all the government's banking transactions.

The Fund has been nudging Islamabad in the direction of TSA one way or another since 2008 when Pakistan signed a stand-by agreement. Pakistani authorities acknowledge the importance and benefits of the TSA in the government's cash flow and debt management, but they believe its implementation is a time-consuming process.

In April this year, when the second through fifth reviews of the ongoing

EFF were conducted, Pakistan committed to completing phase 1 of the implementation of TSA (TSA-1) by end-May and move to phase 2 of the program (TSA-2) soon after.

This would involve transferring around PKR 3 trillion in government funds from commercial bank accounts maintained by federal ministries and divisions and provincial departments to State Bank of Pakistan's federal consolidated fund.

The Fund is now pushing for TSA-1 to be completed by December 2021. This would require all commercial bank accounts by public sector entities to be closed and the funds held in those accounts to be transferred to the single treasury account set up with the State Bank of Pakistan for this purpose.

Pakistan, on the other hand, is now asking for at least two more years to complete TSA-1. The IMF has reportedly gone one step ahead by pushing for an early completion of TSA-2, requiring the attached departments of the Ministry of Defence and the Armed Forces to transfer their funds into TSA in SBP's Federal Consolidated Fund (FCF).

TSA is by no means the only agreed target Pakistan has missed. The Fund staff are flummoxed over how drastically Pakistan's budget 2021-22 estimates and projections have been overtaken by circumstances only a quarter into the new fiscal year.

The current account deficit surged to USD 3.4 billion in the first quarter so it could go up to USD 14 billion keeping in view the existing pace against SBP's projection of USD 6 to USD 9 billion for the current fiscal year.

The import bill have ballooned to around USD 20 billion in the first three months and at the existing pace, it might go close to USD 78 billion by the year end. The curtailment of imports is essential but it could be curtailed at USD 5 billion so the import bill could be restricted to USD 65 billion.

Pakistan needs to undertake a combination of steps on the exchange rate, monetary policy stance, and fiscal fronts, failing which the current account deficit could go out of control.

On the eve of the budget, the government

had envisaged the CAD at just USD 2.3 billion for the whole fiscal year and now a gap of over USD 12 billion had surfaced. Now the IMF is suggesting adjustments to slash the CAD by at least USD 5 to USD 6 billion.

Within the last two weeks, Pakistan's foreign currency reserves held by SBP eroded by USD 1.6 billion mainly because of the maturity of the international bonds as Pakistan paid back USD 1 billion on the five-year maturity of the Sukuk bond issue of 2016.

On the fiscal front, the IMF identified a gap of PKR 500 billion on account of petroleum levy as the government was charging just PKR 5 to 6 per litre on petrol and diesel so the Fund is suggesting either to jack up petroleum by PKR 25 to PKR 30 per litre and bring GST at the standard rate of 17 percent on POL products.

As an alternate, the IMF is also suggesting to do away with GST exemptions in order to fetch PKR 250 to PKR 300 billion, reduce the number of Personal Income Tax (PIT) slabs and increase tax rates on higher income brackets as well as slapping Regulatory Duty (RD) on luxury goods.

Another catch is that restricting imports will also hurt FBR's tax collection so the IMF considers that the taxation measures are essential on an immediate basis for striking staff-level agreement.

On discount rate, the IMF asks for raising policy rate from 7.25 percent to around 8 to 8.5 percent in the next monetary policy committee meeting.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is in a quandary as it faces tough choices either with or without the Fund program, mainly because of the era of window dressing the rotting merchandise is over and time is ripe for Pakistan to bite the bullet and tough and painful measure to fix the country's struggling economy.

Former economic advisor and renowned economist Dr Ashfaq Hassan Khan says he had advised PM Khan against seeking IMF assistance in one of the Economic Advisory Council (EAC) meetings. His reasoning was that to keep the IMF funding flowing, Islamabad would be hard-pressed to appease the United States, which was an

impossibility in the emerging geostrategic situation.

In the absence of a Fund program, the IMF assesses that Pakistan's gross financing requirements in the current 2021-22 and next fiscal year 2022-23 would be standing at over USD 51 billion according to conservative estimates.



But if the yawning current account deficit gets out of control then the gross financing requirement might go up further and could touch USD 60 billion mark during the remaining period of Khan's term.

On in-depth analysis, power sector finance and taxation surface as the two most crucial areas to steer the economy out of crisis. Pakistan has no other option but to undertake serious steps to broaden the narrow tax base and fix the cash-bleeding energy sector by undertaking privatisation of power distribution companies (DISCOs).

No easy solutions exists at this juncture of our chequered economic history. There are tough solutions ahead and the incumbent rulers will have to choose a path where the country can rise to its feet against all odds.

That would require pursuing the path of self-reliance and move towards enhancing productivity and efficiency to achieve a high-growth trajectory without creating any imbalances on internal and external accounts of the national economy.

A Tale of Two Deficits

Imports and remittances are set to go through the roof but the twin deficits and a weak rupee continue to haunt the economy.

By Javed Mahmood

Pakistan's twin deficits – foreign trade and current account deficits – have continued to pose a challenge to economic stability in the country and driven depreciation of rupee against the US dollar and other major currencies in recent days.

In first three months of the ongoing fiscal, the current account deficit surpassed 4.1 percent of the GDP against the projected target of 2 to 3 percent of the GDP by the State Bank of Pakistan.

In monetary term, Pakistan has sustained a hefty current account deficit of USD 3.4 billion during July-Sept period of FY22, whereas during the corresponding period of last fiscal, the current account balance of Pakistan was surplus by USD 864 million.

On average, the country has lost more than USD 1.1 billion every month to current account deficit during the first quarter, something that was shocking for all and sundry in the country. It has ruffled some quite feathers among policy circles, analysts, investors and common people as well.

Trade deficit is among the key reasons of sudden surge in the current account deficit beyond expectations in the first three months of the financial year 2021-22. According to analysts, rising CAD can put the economy in trouble as USD 1 billion monthly deficit could lead to over USD 12 billion CAD in FY22, if this trend continued to prevail throughout the fiscal year.

In the fiscal year 2021, the government was successful in slashing the CAD from USD 20 billion in FY18 to merely USD 1.9 billion in FY21. Nonetheless, the widening deficit was rapidly eroding the country's record foreign exchange reserves strengthened over the period as the rupee lost 13.4 percent against the US dollar in the last five months due to a high demand of the US currency for imports.

In recent weeks, the foreign exchange reserves of the State Bank of Pakistan have depleted by over USD 1.6 billion for two reasons – repayment of USD 1 billion external loans and unexpected and alarming growth in national imports.

Q1 trade deficit

Another shocking development on the economic front was over 100 percent expansion in the trade deficit in first three months of the ongoing financial year. Pakistan's trade imbalance mounted to USD 11.66 billion in July to September period of the year 2021-22 as compared to USD 5.81 billion in corresponding period of 2020-21, reflecting 100.62 percent growth.

According to the data of the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS), imports have increased by 65.08 percent, to USD 18.63 billion in July to September period of FY2020-21 from USD 11.29 billion in the same period of the previous year. Meanwhile, the country's exports were recorded at USD 6.97 billion in July to September



period of the year 2020-21 as compared to USD 5.47 billion in corresponding period of the previous year, showing 27.32 percent growth.

Importantly, the alarmingly high trade deficit has eroded completely the financial or economic benefit of USD 8 billion inflows of remittances sent home by millions of expatriates during July-Sept period of FY22.

Prime Minister's Adviser on Commerce and Investment Abdul Razak Dawood appears satisfied over the ongoing trends of exports.

In a recent tweet, he said, "Our exports have increased by 27.4% in Sep 2021, to USD 2.41 billion as compared to USD 1.89 billion in Sep 2020." He further said that for the first quarter (Q1) of FY 2021-22, the exports have increased by 28 percent and surged to USD 6.99 billion as compared to USD 5.47 million in Q1 of FY2020-21. "This has been due to hard work of our exporters & they deserve praise for this accomplishment," he added.

Rupee depreciation

In recent days, the depreciation of rupee against the US dollar and other currencies has accelerated rapidly. A few months ago, the dollar-rupee exchange rate in the inter-bank operations was fluctuating around 150 to 152 rupees only. But these days, this exchange rate has crossed 174 rupees now as imports and current account deficits surged beyond everyone's guess in first quarter of the ongoing financial year.

A couple of weeks back, the government put some barriers in the way of the dollar and over-the-expectations growth in imports, but still the prevailing situation is not favourable for rupee, which continues to lose ground almost daily.

A new trend has been noted in the dollar-rupee exchange rate in recent days. The banks and currency exchange companies keep the rate of dollar and other currencies high throughout the day and before closing, they slightly reduce the exchange rate of dollar. In this way, the banks and currency exchange companies are robbing the dollar buyers by artificially keep the exchange rate throughout the day.

Interestingly, neither the State Bank, nor the government have taken any steps to counter this organised financial malpractice in the country.

In the Pervez Musharraf era, when the dollar started showing unwanted upward jumps, the then Governor State Bank of Pakistan, Dr Shamshad Akhtar announced 25 paisa margin of trading in the inter-bank and open market exchange rate of dollar. At that time the central bank strictly enforced that decision and this strategy ended speculations in the market and upward flight of dollar.

These days, there is a gap of about one rupee in the inter-bank and open market exchange rate and this is also a reason of major downward fluctuations in the value of rupee vis-à-vis the dollar. If the same strategy is applied once again, it can help end the ongoing artificial hike in the dollar and other major currencies and keep the markets' unscrupulous forces from manipulating the exchange rate to fulfil their lust for minting money by hook or by crook.

Encouraging data from September 2021

The State Bank of Pakistan has said the current account deficit declined to USD 1.11 billion in September 2021, against USD 1.47 billion in August 2021. Thus, the current account deficit dropped 24 percent month-on-month basis in September 2021, driven by a 10 percent surge in exports and 2 percent decline in imports.

Exports of goods mounted to an all-time high of USD 2.64 billion in September, up 13 percent when compared with the corresponding month of last year. The projected current account deficit might remain in the range of USD 10-11 billion (3-3.5 percent of GDP) in FY22.

The ongoing rupee slide against the US dollar would discourage imports in the coming months. Measures taken by the State Bank and the government to reduce the import bill are bearing fruit. In Sept 2021, the SBP imposed 100 percent cash margin on the import of 114 items to discourage imports of non-essential goods and support the balance of payments position of Pakistan. With this, the total number of items subject to the cash margin expanded to 525.

Meanwhile, the central bank has also slapped a ban on bank financing for importing cars from Sept 2021 and this policy decision would also slow down car imports in the financial year 2021-22 and this step is expected to lighten the import bill and ease the pressure on national foreign exchange reserves and dollar-rupee exchange rate because vehicles import falls among the leading imports categories in the country.

SBP Governor Dr Reza Baqir had said that given expected resilience in remittances and an improved outlook for exports, the

CAD is expected to converge towards a sustainable range of 2-3 percent of GDP in FY22.

The remittances have been still high with an average USD 2.7 billion per month during the current fiscal year while the exports also noted a significant increase, but the CAD crossed the limit calculated by the State Bank and that too within three months.

Meanwhile, the Ministry of Finance in a press statement has stressed the surge in import bill was due to a combination of a few one-off imports and rising global commodities and energy prices.

The ministry said overall the country spent USD 1 billion on vaccines in the first quarter of FY22 which included USD 400 million in September alone. "Therefore, adjustment with vaccines import, the current account deficit for the quarter has reduced to USD 2.4 billion," it added.

On export front, the trend is increasing on month-on-month basis to USD 2.64 billion in September or 12.5 percent. Similarly, remittances are right on track to reach USD 32 billion in 2021-22. Remittances and exports combined will be in the range of USD 65 billion in FY22.

According to State Bank of Pakistan, a strong rebound in economic activity and higher international commodity prices kept the current account deficit at a high level of USD 3.4 billion in Q1FY22. The CAD expanded on the back of soaring imports, which increased 64 percent year-on-year during the July-September quarter.

The good news is that exports also registered a surge of 35.2 percent during the period while remittances stood strong, soaring to USD 8 billion. During the July-September quarter, oil prices rose from USD 60 to USD 85 per barrel, which inflated the import bill. Moreover, higher non-energy imports coupled with the upturn in global commodity prices further bloated the bill.

Freight and air travel costs also surged significantly on the back of recovery in global demand of consumer items as more and more countries were lifting Covid-19 restrictions.



Blame Politics, Not IMF

The IMF is implacable because political considerations kept the government from delivering the reforms it promised to undertake.



By Khalique Ahmad

In July 2019, when the International Monetary Fund (IMF) formally approved USD 6 billion bailout package for Pakistan, then facing a balance of payment crisis, one of the central themes of the agreement was ‘energy sector reforms to eliminate quasi-fiscal losses and encourage investment, including by depoliticising gas and power tariff setting and over the program period, gradually bringing the sector to cost recovery’.

Based on this commitment, David Lipton, First Deputy Managing Director and then Acting chief of IMF had announced that the strong financial support to the authorities’ policy efforts by Pakistan’s international partners was essential to meet the large external financing needs in the coming years and allow the program to achieve its objectives.

So besides the other financial and monetary policy objectives, the key objective of the programme was to eliminate losses, depoliticise tariff setting, and ultimately bring the power sector to full cost recovery within the 39-month fund facility period ending 1 October 2022.

Almost 30 months down the road, Pakistan has not shown any visible, sustainable progress on any of these programme objectives for the country’s beleaguered power sector, and any progress that has been seen at all has followed the chronic one-step-forward-two-steps-back pattern.

System losses have not eased, tariff setting remains highly politicised, and full cost recovery remains a pipedream despite a punitive 50 percent increase in power tariffs during the three years in power of the incumbent government.

The IMF had noted at the outset that quasi-fiscal losses increased further and represented a significant fiscal risk.

“Following several years of steady decline in the flow of circular debt in the power sector, new arrears were accumulated over FYs 2018 and 2019, reaching close to PKR 800 billion (around 2 percent of GDP)”, the IMF had reported.

Delays in adjusting tariffs, reversal of policies – such as revenue-based load shedding – and the non-payment of implicit

subsidies by the government had been the main contributors to the increase in arrears.

As a result, the stock of circular debt stood at over 4 percent of GDP as of March 2019. This was in addition to arrears in the gas sector totalling to over half a percent of GDP, coming mostly from delays in tariff notifications and increasing technical losses.

Circular debt normally refers to the cash flow shortfall incurred in the power sector from the non-payment of obligations by consumers, distribution companies, and government organisations.

Implicit tariff subsidies granted to special groups (exporters, agricultural tubewells, AJK) have remained outside the budget and their non-payment has further bloated circular debt.

The authorities then promised to launch ambitious reforms in the energy sector aimed at addressing inefficiencies and eliminating quasi-fiscal losses, agreeing that structural weaknesses in the energy sector had long remained unaddressed.

They had accepted that only an all-encompassing strategy, including pricing policies and supply and demand management, could deliver the improvements needed to make Pakistan's energy sector an engine of growth rather than a hindrance.

As a follow up, the government put out a narrative that eliminating power sector losses on a sustainable basis was unavoidable with new pricing policies and improvements in governance and infrastructure as the arrears flowed out of applicable tariffs that were far below the required levels and only approved with significant delays, implicit subsidies provided by the government that have long remained unbudgeted, and technical and distribution losses.

Therefore, it started off with a 10 percent increase in tariff at the outset as prior action to generate PKR 150 billion in additional revenue and set in motion automatic quarterly tariff adjustments.

This was to be followed by a set schedule of tariff as per regulator's determinations for following years to allow for automatic quarterly tariff adjustments along with a plan to tackle the outstanding circular debt stock.

The plan, however, got derailed first due to political reasons followed by the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic early last year. The Fund programme was given a pause to absorb the economic shock from the health pandemic.

In January-February this year, the two sides agreed to revive the programme with some additional disbursements by the IMF.

To bring the fund programme back on track, the government took some tough decisions as prior conditions including significantly increasing electricity prices, PKR 140 billion in additional taxes, and an unprecedented autonomy for the central bank.

The government thus increased electricity base prices by 16 percent in February and made a commitment to further increase tariffs by 36 percent in six months between April and October 2021.

To ensure this, the federal cabinet approved the promulgation of an ordinance aimed at preparing a legal path to increase power tariff by a minimum of PKR 5.65 per unit from April till October to collect a whopping PKR 900 billion from consumers.

The cabinet allowed further amending the NEPRA Act, through an ordinance, to give powers to the government to impose a new surcharge equal to 10 percent of the electricity revenue requirements or PKR 1.40 per unit.

In addition, the ordinance also envisaged measures to implement the Circular Debt Management Plan, approved by the cabinet, to ensure notification of tariff determined by the regulator in 15 days in case of quarterly adjustments and one-month for annual tariff adjustments.



The circular debt management plan envisaged at that time also promised passing on additional burden of PKR 1.135 trillion to consumers between April 2021 and June 2023 to put power tariff on a full cost recovery level with per-unit tariff increase of over PKR 7 per unit including a special surcharge and PKR 8.95 per unit and the initial PKR 1.95 per unit increase.

But with an initial PKR 1.95 per unit increase in tariff and quarterly tariff adjustments, politics took over again and even though tariff schedule was approved by the cabinet led by Prime Minister himself, then Finance Minister Hafeez Shaikh was sent packing for, among other things, committing too steep a tariff increase plan.

The programme derailed again and the IMF said it was flexible to make adjustments without compromising on the basic objectives of the programme. That is, elimination of losses, depoliticised tariff setting, and full cost recovery.

In recent talks once again, the theme remained unchanged and the government

had to announce PKR 1.40 per unit average tariff increase as a pre-condition to revive the programme. This means the government would generate at least PKR 139 billion additional funds to power companies this year due to which the amount of subsidy will be slashed. The government has allocated PKR 330 billion subsidy in budget 2021-22 against power division's demand of PKR 501 billion.

The base tariff has thus increased by almost 55 percent to PKR 17.85 per unit on average since the current government came

to power. This does not include surcharges, taxes and other charges, etc.

On top of that, a significant burden in the form of higher monthly fuel cost adjustment has also become a norm – PKR 1.38 per unit in July, PKR 1.95 per unit in August and PKR 2.66 per unit pending for September.

The understanding given to IMF was that the government would reduce power sector losses by 0.5 percent each year starting this year and improve recovery by 1.33 percent per year to contain circular debt that stood at well above PKR 2.28 trillion as of 30 June 2021, compared with PKR 2.15 trillion as of 30 June 2020.

This is why an agreement with the IMF on power sector remains elusive this time, given the Fund's uncompromising stance that without de-politicisation of tariff, reduction in losses, and improvement in recoveries, the power sector cannot stand on its own feet and all half-hearted actions would keep the sector unsustainable.

Forever Together, for Better or for Worse

The perks & pains of being Afghanistan's closest neighbour.

By **Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi**

Pakistan and Afghanistan share deep historic, religious, cultural, civilizational, and ethnic bonds. But probably the most important of the two countries' linkages is the bond of neighbourhood. The two countries have remained in close physical proximity for millennia – and will remain that way in the foreseeable future barring a cosmic accident.

As would be expected, this close proximity has its perks as well as its pains. Here is a look at the costs and benefits of being Afghanistan's closest neighbour in terms of economy.

Afghanistan at a glance

Population of Afghanistan is less than 4 crore or 38.93 million exactly by 2020. Its GDP size is USD 19.81 billion (nominal, 2021 estimated) or USD 78.88 billion (purchasing power parity = PPP, 2019 estimated) and the GDP per capita (PPP) is about USD 2,000. In its overall GDP, the contribution of agriculture is 23 percent, industry is 21.1 percent, and services 55.9 percent.

The refugee factor

Refugees' dependence is likely to grow on Pakistan from Afghanistan and not likely to reduce in anyway. Going by the UNHCR refugee register, there are 1.4 million Afghan Refugees in Pakistan. However, their total number comes closer to 3 million, the majority of them unregistered with UNHCR.

There are around 6,000 Afghan studying in universities and colleges in Pakistan with 500,000 refugee students enrolled in schools in Pakistan. There are 2,000 fully funded scholarships for higher education in Pakistan.

Foreign trade

It imports over USD 6 billion worth of goods but legally exports about USD 1 billion worth of produce, mainly fruits and nuts. Despite holding over USD 1 trillion in proven untapped mineral deposits, Afghanistan remains one of the least developed countries in the world. Its unemployment rate is over 23 percent and about half of its population lives below the poverty line.

Bilateral trade

The two countries have substantial trade linkages. Pakistan used to be Afghanistan's largest trade partner but now India and Iran are their largest trading partners. The declining volume of Pakistani exports to Afghanistan is not only depriving the country of a major market for its products but also giving local exporters sleepless nights.

Data released by the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) showed that Pakistan's exports to Afghanistan fell 5.5 per cent from USD 790 million to USD 746.3 million during the first nine months of the current fiscal year. While sugar, petroleum products, wheat and

rice are the top exports to Afghanistan, Pakistan imports grapes, apples, coal, and cotton from Afghanistan.

Even after the advent of Taliban government, industry in Peshawar, like printing, pharmaceutical, flour, cement, steel and others, which were directly linked to Afghan consumers, had shrunk during last few years after heavy involvement of India with USA pressures. Now that is easing but that trade is still to take a regular shape, before it has to revert back to its past potential.

Forex drain

Net loss of US withdrawal from Afghanistan in daily dollar terms trade is around USD 6-8 million, which has now reversed as Afghan demand has returned to USD 2-3 million daily. This is being fulfilled from Pakistan dollar market with additional impact going up to USD 3 billion.

The inflow from Afghanistan to Pakistan was due to US forces demands. Moreover, US dollar demand of Afghanistan is being fulfilled from Pakistan now, creating a huge pressure on Pak rupee. This partly explains a significant depreciation of Pak rupee in last few weeks.

Pakistan's Trade with Afghanistan (US\$ Million)

Year	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Exports	1699	1230	1134	1495	1193	890
Imports	37	41	68	152	170	122
Trade Balance	1662	1190	1066	1343	1022	768

Transit trade & smuggling

Afghan transit trade is the main source of smuggling into Pakistan. Besides causing annual revenue loss of up to USD 3 billion to the national exchequer, it is also promoting terrorism in the country as explosive devices and other material are also being smuggled through it, it has been revealed. A World Bank document says smuggling through Afghan transit trade alone caused USD 35 billion revenue loss in the period between 2001 and 2009.

Smuggling is now a routine in most of the economic activities in Pakistan. Pakistan is facing the enormous challenge of measuring and curbing revenue leakages due to smuggling, the report says. These leakages are estimated to be 50 to 60 percent of the regular economy. Cheaper products like cloths, fancy tiles, auto parts, electronics goods, crockery and other items are being smuggled into the country to the detriment of the local industry.

Pakistan and Afghanistan extended the 'Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA) 2010' for six months beyond 11 May 2021. The 2010 APTTA allows both countries to use each other's airports, railways, roads and ports for transit trade along designated transit corridors.

The agreement does not cover road transport vehicles from any

third country, be it from India or any Central Asian country. Over the last 10 years, 832,819 ATT containers, carrying goods worth USD 33 billion, passed through Pakistan, as per data compiled by the FBR Directorate General of Transit Trade.

Around 30 percent of Afghan Transit Trade passes through Pakistan.

Security implications

Pakistan continues to pay a heavy price both in the economic and security terms due to this situation and a substantial portion of precious national resources both human and material, have been diverted to address the emerging security challenges for the last several years.

The cumulative bearing of these developments adversely impacted the overall growth rate in many sectors of the local economy.

Security situation in Afghanistan effects our trade with Central Asian Republics and beyond. Pakistan exports to Afghanistan and CAR's showed a mixed trend over time (For Reference Table-1 in Annex).

Uzbekistan's Trade with Pakistan has been very erratic due to fluctuations in exports. In 2020, the trade deficit for Pakistan was USD 73 million as imports and exports stood at USD 97 and USD 24 million respectively.

Pakistan's gateway to Central Asia

Pakistan is considered only (or at least the most economical) gateway to Central Asia. Trans-Afghan Railway Line Project was signed and agreed between Pakistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan this year. It is hoped that Involvement with TIR (International Road Transport or Transports Internationaux Routiers) will unleash great potential for trade in Pakistan and from Pakistan.

The first-ever containerised shipment from Pakistan under TIR reached Tashkent in 48 hours from Torkham. It departed from Karachi on 29 April 2021 and arrived in Tashkent on 4 May 2021 via the Karachi-Kabul-Termez route.

An Uzbek cargo truck then took a shipment of leather products from Tashkent on 9 May and arrived at the Afghan-Pakistani border (Torkham crossing) on 11 May. Then the consignment was trucked to Faisalabad on 13 May.

As a result of TIR, the Afghan government will not check Pakistani trucks carrying goods to Central Asian countries.

The stalled CASA-1000 project is a 1,270 km (113 km in Pakistan) power transmission line that is expected to export excess hydro-power generated in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan.

Work on the construction of a transmission line in Afghanistan and Central Asian countries has been going on for almost a year now.

When completed, CASA-1000 will enable the supply of as much as 4,500 GWh of sustainable and clean electricity. Cost of the Pakistan's component (113-km HVDC line and the convertor station) is USD 205 million.

Afghanistan's mineral wealth

In Afghanistan, significant amount of resources includes minerals, oil, natural gas, marble, granite, sand, coal, lapis lazuli and gemstones. Currently the Aynak and Hajigak concessions in collaboration with the Chinese conglomerate China Metallurgical Group Corporation (MCC) is targeting mining industries with the potential of around USD 1 trillion earnings.

However, the social, economic, cultural and political situation of Afghanistan does not favour largescale extraction of minerals. There is scope for Pakistani registered mining Small and medium firms to capitalise the mining industries.

Farm produce

Pakistan is a major importer of Afghan fresh produce including vegetables and fruits; and dry fruits like almond, walnut, and chilghoza.

Another important aspect for Pakistan is Afghanistan's wheat consumption requirement that is around 7 million tons annually. Wheat as staple food accounts for approximately 60 percent of the calories intake of the population.

Production of wheat in Afghanistan covers 70 percent of the cultivated land area to feed 39-40 million population. Pakistan supplies significant amount of wheat and pulses to Afghanistan to fill the demand-supply gap.

Pakistan's Trade with Afghanistan (US\$ Million)

Export Items	Value	Import Items	Value
Cereals	146.51	Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	161.91
Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	86.92	Edible fruits, nuts, peel of citrus fruit, melons	141.90
Pharmaceutical products	73.84	Cotton	117.13
Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	73.80	Mineral fuels, oils, distillation products	43.26
Animal, vegetable fats and oils, cleavage products	43.13	Iron and steel	17.81
Edible vegetables and certain roots and tubers	38.34	Salt, sulphur, earth, stone, plaster, lime and cement	15.57
Wood and articles of wood, wood charcoal	32.85	Oil seed, oleag fruits, grain, seed, fruits	8.46
Plastics	32.37	Coffee, tea, mate and spices	2.33
Iron and steel	28.51	Raw hides and skins (other than furskins) and leather	2.20
Sugars and sugar confectionery	24.72	Cereals	

The Rise of Dengue Continues

The government, particularly in Punjab, is yet to wake up to the problem.

By Noor Aftab

With deadly Covid-19 epidemic just receding although far from over, the last thing Pakistan needed was the outbreak of yet another potentially deadly disease. But the unfortunate rise of the dengue virus at this juncture is posing precisely that challenge.

Some 9,996 confirmed cases of dengue have so far been reported across in different cities of Punjab during the current year, 6,640 of them reported in Lahore alone. Many cases have been reported in Islamabad, and of late, in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province.

The coronavirus is on the decline but it still exists and health experts maintain it will continue to exist in the coming years. The number of confirmed coronavirus cases is 1,269,234 while active cases are 23,940 in the country.

As far as dengue virus is concerned the cases also seem to be on the rise in Mansehra of the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province. The major cities appear to be bracing for yet another dengue outbreak as health experts have warned of the increased presence of dengue larvae following the recent spell of rain in the province.

Dengue serotype 2 is the most prevalent circulating serotype in Pakistan, with few reported cases of serotype 3. In 2017, the KP faced an epidemic of dengue, with 18,856 cases and multiple deaths, which was attributed to a different lineage of dengue virus serotype 2.

This lineage entered Pakistan from China around 2016 and spread in 2017. Vectors of dengue virus are mosquitoes of the Aedes genus, which are capable of transmitting other viruses, such as chikungunya, Zika, and yellow fever.

Vector populations are increasing in areas around the world. Other global change factors – including the growing population and increasing agriculture, deforestation, and urbanisation – equally and substantially contribute to the spread of mosquitoes.

Clearly, Pakistan has all the elements required for a rise in the number of infections transmitted by mosquitoes.

Inaction

The Punjab government has yet to mount any serious effort to stop fast transmission of dengue because of the tardy work to destroy the breeding grounds of mosquitoes spreading the virus.

Water accumulated alongside the roads on green belts, government offices, private buildings and residential areas after the spell of rains in the province. But the teams formed to control dengue visited very few places to check breeding of larvae.

The provincial government was supposed to establish dengue cells comprising public health experts besides constituting



teams of the police and district government officials to conduct raids to book those violating the Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) or guidelines.

The official data showed it never happened, resulting in spread of the dengue virus especially in areas having dense population.

The situation turned worse when the Punjab health department reportedly received complaints against surveillance workers of extorting money from traders by threatening to close their businesses because of the presence of the larva.

The upscale areas of Lahore appeared at higher risk as around 80 percent of dengue patients in Lahore were from the Defense, Gulberg, Bahria Town, and Model Town areas.

Challenges

Bed occupancy of High Dependency Units (HDUs) of the hospitals in the province, designated for the critical care of dengue patients with complications, is reaching full capacity.

The government has established a field hospital at Expo Centre in Lahore that is proving helpful for the people but it should also focus on the other hospitals where the staff members are not taking the matter seriously.

A district government official alleged that thousands of dengue workers recruited on a political basis, especially in Lahore, were responsible for the failure of the recent campaigns against the disease.

The rise in dengue cases is intensifying across Punjab. In addition, it is highly important that all people take care of cleanliness and avoid throwing garbage in public places. The people should be more responsible and active to save themselves from the dengue virus.

Misperception

Health experts have issued a public-service message underlining the need to prevent misinformation about dengue and encourage people to take precautionary measures.

For example, many people believe that the dengue mosquito is active only at dawn and dusk. But research suggests that the *Aedes* mosquito, also responsible for the spread of dengue, bites during the day as well, especially two hours after sunrise and before sunset.

Immediate action is needed to ensure that the outbreak is contained as soon as possible and does not reach the near-epidemic proportions of 2019, when cases in Punjab rose to more than 8,670 with over 50,000 reported from all of Pakistan.

New strains

All four strains of the dengue virus – DENV-1, DENV-2, DENV-3, DENV-4 – are circulating in Lahore, which means the number of critical patients and deaths may increase. The incidence of DENV-1 is four percent while DENV-4 has been recorded in nine percent of patients.

Additionally, four percent of those infected in Punjab have both DENV-2 and DENV-3 viruses, which may have had an impact on mortality rates. Infection with one strain does not provide immunity against other strains so that person living in an endemic area can have up to four dengue infections during his or her life span.

Risk of dengue transmission is present throughout Pakistan at elevations below 2,300 m (7,500 ft), including the city of Islamabad. Transmission typically occurs between July and November. This is the first time dengue has been reported in the tourist destinations.

Symptoms

Dengue is a disease caused by a virus spread through mosquito bites. The disease can take up to 2 weeks to develop with illness generally lasting less than a week. In some cases, Dengue infection is asymptomatic.

Those with symptoms get ill between 4 and 7 days after the bite. The infection is characterized by flu-like symptoms which include a sudden high fever coming in separate waves; pain behind the eyes; muscle, joint, and bone pain; severe headache; and a skin rash with red spots.

Treatment includes supportive care of symptoms but there is no antiviral treatment available. Health effects from dengue include fever, headache, nausea, vomiting, rash, muscle and joint pain, and minor bleeding.

Dengue can become severe within a few hours. Severe dengue is a medical emergency, usually requiring hospitalisation. In severe cases, health effects can include haemorrhage (uncontrolled bleeding), shock (seriously low blood pressure), organ failure and death.

Prevention

The people should take meticulous measures to prevent mosquito bites during the daytime. They should use a repellent containing 20-30 percent DEET or 20 percent Picaridin on exposed skin.

Wearing neutral-coloured (beige, light grey), long-sleeved and breathable garments is also helpful in the current situation. They should get rid of water containers around dwellings and ensure that door and window screens work properly.

They should not leave stagnant water lying anywhere in or around the house. Mosquitoes live and breed on stagnant water, whether it is dirty or clean. They should keep the doors and windows of the house closed, mostly early in the morning and during the evening.

Using anti-mosquito sprays especially in the corners of the house is highly effective in killing the hidden mosquitoes.

Advisory

The National Institute of Health's Field Epidemiology and Disease Surveillance Division has issued an advisory regarding prevention and control of dengue virus across the country.

The objective of the advisory is to sensitise human and animal healthcare authorities to further strengthen and improve the level of preparedness in prevention and control of the disease.

According to the advisory, dengue is a viral disease transmitted by mosquitoes of the genus *Aedes*. It is endemic to almost all geographical regions of Pakistan and there is substantial evidence that its multiple serotypes are circulating in different areas of the country.

Despite patchy surveillance, a total of 53,498 cases with 95 deaths due to dengue fever were reported in 2019 while 6,016 cases were reported in 2020, and 3,795 cases have been reported in 2021 up to September.

Climate change

Mosquito distributions are highly dynamic in space and time, as their life cycles are short and heavily influenced by environmental variation. The incidence of dengue has increased 30-fold over the past 50 years.

Climate is an important driver of the current distribution and incidence of dengue. The geographic ranges of the primary *Aedes* mosquito are expanding. This may lead to a greater burden of dengue in low- and middle-income countries like Pakistan.

The latest models suggest that new geographic areas along the fringe of current geographic ranges for *Aedes* will become environmentally suitable for the mosquito's lifecycle, and for dengue transmission.

Climatic changes resulting in increased temperature and rainfall, together with urbanisation, may therefore be associated with increased dengue incidence and outbreak risk.

It is very difficult to control or eliminate *Aedes* mosquitoes, and after their introduction, they can become established if climatic and ecological conditions are suitable.

They adapt to human environments and their populations often recover from natural disturbances such as drought or human control measures.

Why Covid-19 is Not Going Away Anytime Soon

Vaccination and preventive measures are as important as ever, experts say.

By **Ahmer Kureishi**

The Covid-19 global pandemic appears to be receding around the world with life returning to a semblance of normalcy in several countries including Pakistan. But experts have warned it will be a mistake to believe we have seen the last of the deadly virus.

The advent of this virulent pathogen in November 2019 in China's Wuhan province and its subsequent spread to other countries prompted what has since become the history's largest vaccination effort. According to Bloomberg, more than 6.86 billion doses of the various coronavirus vaccines had been administered across 184 countries as of 25 October 2021.

Yet, scientists and epidemiologists around the world are warning against complacency. The message they double down on is this: The disease will not have been beaten back until it has touched almost every human alive – either through vaccination or infection.

"I see these continued surges occurring throughout the world," Michael Osterholm, director of the Centre for Infectious Disease Research and Policy at the University of Minnesota in Minneapolis and an adviser to U.S. President Joe Biden, has been quoted as saying by Bloomberg.

"Then it will drop, potentially somewhat precipitously. And then I think we very easily could see another surge in the fall and winter".

The important things to do right now, therefore, are to accelerate vaccination campaigns and keep physical distancing protocols in place. "The race between the waves of transmission that lead to new variants and the battle to get the globe inoculated won't be over until the coronavirus has touched all of us", says Bloomberg.

"With billions of people around the world yet to be vaccinated and little chance now of eliminating the virus, we can expect more outbreaks in classrooms, on public transport and in workplaces over the coming months, as economies push ahead with reopening.

"Even as immunization rates rise, there will always be people who are vulnerable to the virus: New-born babies, people who can't or won't get inoculated, and those who get vaccinated but suffer breakthrough infections as their protection levels ebb."

The next few months will be rough, says the report. "One key danger is if a vaccine-resistant variant develops, although it is not the only risk ahead.

"The five well-documented influenza pandemics of the past 130 years offer some blueprint for how Covid might play out, according to Lone Simonsen, an epidemiologist and professor of population health sciences at Roskilde University in Denmark. She is an expert on the ebb and flow of such events.

"While the longest global flu outbreak lasted five years, they mostly consisted of two to four waves of infection over an average of two or three years, she said. Covid is already shaping up to be among



the more severe pandemics, as its second year concludes with the world in the middle of a third wave — and no end in sight.

It is possible that the virus known as SARS-CoV-2 will not follow the path traced by the pandemics of the past. After all, it is a different, novel and potentially more transmissible pathogen. And with a death toll of more than 4.6 million people so far, it's already more than twice as deadly as any outbreak since the 1918 Spanish flu.

Nations where vaccination has been sparse – including Malaysia, Mexico, Iran and Australia – are in the midst of their biggest outbreaks yet, fuelled by the contagious delta strain. With the virus still spreading out of control in vast swathes of the planet, another novel variant could quite feasibly emerge.

Early in the Covid outbreak, there was good reason to hope that vaccines would provide long-term protection, much like childhood shots that stop diseases such as polio. But those hopes have since been dashed. Medical scholarship tells us Covid could be like the flu, requiring regular vaccine top-ups to remain effective as the virus evolves.

Some researchers say SARS-CoV-2 is poised to become completely resistant to the first generation of vaccines. Other even grimmer possibilities for the coming months include the emergence of a novel influenza virus or another coronavirus making the leap from animals into humans.

Perhaps the grimmest of all is the scenarios of another new virulent pathogen arriving while we are still dealing the SARS-CoV-2.

The pandemic will end at different times in different places, just as previous outbreaks have, says the report quoting Erica Charters, associate professor of the history of medicine at Oxford University and the coordinator of a project on how epidemics end.

Nations like Denmark and Singapore, which have managed to keep cases relatively contained, are already moving toward a post-pandemic future with fewer safety restrictions. Others, such as the U.S. and U.K., are opening up even as infection numbers near records.

"The end process is not going to be uniform. [The pandemic] is a biological phenomenon, but it's also a political and social phenomenon", Charters said.

Facebook's Fairytale Egalitarianism was a Fairytale After All

The tech giant is resisting a US Magistrate's bid for data to nail how disinformation begat genocide of the Rohingya.

By Mishaal Ashraf

Facebook, one of the largest social media platforms, has once again caught itself in the red zone. In the past, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg publicly announced that Facebook Inc. allows more than 3 billion users to voice their views at an equal footing with the social elites. Facebook claims to provide an equal opportunity for all, but that is not the case.

In September 2021, the Wall Street Journal reviewed some of the company's documents and found out that Facebook has built an internal system that allows the status quo to escape accountability. The initial intent behind the program "XCheck" was to take quality-control measures for actions taken against high profile accounts including journalists, politicians, and celebrities.

The program protects millions of society's elites to get away from the company's regular enforcement process. Facebook has categorised some users as "whitelisted" which renders them immune to enforcement actions, lending them the ability to use the platform to post material that violates the company's declared policies.

The documents revealed that XCheck has protected VIPs' posts that clearly violated Facebook's policies – the kind of content that would normally lead to sanctions for the user.

In 2019, Facebook allowed the international football star, Neymar, to post compromising images of a woman who had accused the football star of sexual harassment. Also in 2019, an internal review at Facebook reached the conclusion that the company favoured some users over others.

The confidential review said, "We are not actually doing what we say publicly". The report said the company's actions are a "breach of trust" and added: "Unlike the rest of our community, these people can violate our standards without any consequences."

Later, Facebook spokesperson Andy Stone said, "The system was designed for an important reason: to create an additional step so we can accurately enforce policies on content that could require more understanding."

Linking Facebook's actions to the genocide of 24,000 people in Myanmar, court has ordered Facebook to disclose internal documents and private user data. US Magistrate Zia Faruqi said that the tech giant must release private records from its private investigation into its role in the systematic mass executions of Rohingya people, a Muslim minority group of Myanmar's Rakhine state.

Faruqi wrote, "Locking away the requested content would be throwing away the opportunity to understand how disinformation begat genocide of the Rohingya".

However, Facebook counters that releasing users' private data would violate the federal law under the US Stored Communications Act (SCA). The tech giant further argued that completing the court's order would create a "grave human rights concerns of its own".



Facebook's Director of South and Southeast Asia Policy, Rafael Frankel issued a statement, "We support international efforts to bring accountability for atrocity crimes committed against the Rohingya people. We've made voluntary, lawful disclosures to the UN's Investigative Mechanism for more than a year and we commit to disclosing information to The Gambia to complement that effort.

"We also support modernising the SCA and reforms that allow a broader range of disclosures for significant investigations like this, while avoiding a precedent that risks the privacy and human rights of billions of people."

In 2016, the Myanmar military conducted a series of "clearance operations" against the ethnic group that included various forms of sexual and physical harassment, as well as mass executions. Hate campaigns on Facebook against Rohingya led to "communal violence and mob justice", as claimed by The Republic of Gambia in international court filings.

The organised groups used "multiple fake accounts and news pages to spread hate speech, fake news, and misinformation for political gain".

The tech giant confessed that it was "too slow to respond to the concerns raised" regarding the situation in Myanmar and said it would cooperate with Faruqi to release public information on "hundreds of accounts, groups, and pages removed from its platform."

Facebook says Faruqi's order is "sweeping and unprecedented" and that it "creates grave human rights concerns of its own, leaving internet users' private content unprotected and thereby susceptible to disclosure — at a provider's whim — to private litigants, foreign governments, law enforcement, or anyone else."

Frances Haugen and Sophie Zhang, former Facebook employees and whistle blowers also raised concerns over Facebook's international security issues.

"Facebook's consistent understaffing of the counterespionage, information operations, and counterterrorism teams is a national security issue...I have strong national security concerns about how Facebook operates today", Haugen said in a testimony.



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Shaheens Begin T20i WC by Putting Pakistan on Cloud 9

Their hearts swollen with back-to-back victories, Pakistanis showed grace by silencing any ungracious voices coming from social media ranks.

By Ali Abdullah

Two matches into the Super 12 stage of ICC Men's T20 World Cup, many cricket fans in Pakistan are saying they would be happy if the Green Shirts ended their campaign without achieving anything more: They have humiliated arrogant India with a ten-wicket defeat and downed New Zealand by five wickets in the first two games of the tourney.

After humiliating arch-rivals India and taking sweet revenge on Kiwis, Shaheens have gone top of their Super 12 group. The best part, however, was how the Pakistani social media stayed graceful in the wake of the back-to-back victories, quickly taking to task the few ungracious voices coming from among their ranks

Pakistan vs India is always a high-string, high-stakes affair filled with plenty of drama be it an ICC event or a bilateral series. This game, however, topped all previous games given the context of cancelled NZ and England tours and the arrogant behaviour of Indian fans and some former players ahead of the match.

Going into the game, Pakistan were underdogs for two reasons: Firstly, India have the upper hand of the head-to-head tally in the T20i format of the game – although Pakistan is the clear winner in both the other formats. Before this game, Pakistan had defeated India only once in this format, in 2012.

The second reason was Pakistan's legendary World Cups jinx: For some odd reason, India have dominated Pakistan at ICC events in both 50-over and T20i World Cups. Before this game, Pakistan and India had clashed five times in T20i World Cups, every last one of them going to India.

Who knew it would fall to the lot of Babar Azam's young squad to break the jinx on 24 October 2021?

Two of the greatest batsmen of this generation, Virat Kohli and Babar Azam led their respective sides. Both teams stacked plenty of star power, setting up expectations for a high-quality game but the pressure was clearly on Pakistan.

However, on this occasion, the Green Shirts dealt with the pressure successfully, converting it to their strength.

After Babar Azam elected to bat after winning the toss, the game began with Shaheen Shah Afridi's new ball heroics as in-form KL Rahul and Rohit Sharma were sent back early to the dugouts.

This was followed by Hasan Ali's dismissal of Suryakumar Yadav, and the Pakistani side started visibly smelling blood. Virat Kohli and Rishabh Pant put a 50-plus partnership to bring India back in the game, but that was about all the resistance India had.

Pakistan kept picking up wickets on regular intervals and India managed only 151 runs on the board. Afridi emerged as the star of the show with 3 wickets in his 4 over spell.

It was still very much an evenly poised game when Babar Azam and Mohammad Rizwan walked to the middle, but things soon took on a different complexion as the pair started mercilessly pommelling the Indian bowling.

In the end, Shaheens made it look like a walk in the park by achieving the target in 14 overs without losing any wicket.

The game against New Zealand was equally high-strung because the Shaheens were under pressure to win it to prove a point or two.

And indeed they made the Kiwis rue their lack of experience playing Pakistan bowlers when they struggled to face the young pacer Haris Rauf who finished with 4-22, restricting the New Zealand to a paltry 134-8.

ICC MEN'S T20 WORLD CUP 2021			
SUPER 12		GROUP 2	
PAK v A2	1	2 NOV 2021	18:00, ABU DHABI
NZ v B1	1	3 NOV 2021	18:00, DUBAI
IND v AFG	1	3 NOV 2021	18:00, ABU DHABI
NZ v A2	1	5 NOV 2021	14:00, SHARJAH
IND v B1	1	5 NOV 2021	18:00, DUBAI
NZ v AFG	1	7 NOV 2021	14:00, ABU DHABI
PAK v B1	1	7 NOV 2021	18:00, SHARJAH
IND v A2	1	8 NOV 2021	18:00, DUBAI

Given how they humiliated India in the previous game, Pakistan were expected to cruise to the target but that was not to be as their signature batting collapse emerged again after Babar Azam's early dismissal.

By over number 15, the games appeared to be slipping out of the reach of the Men in Green 87 with five wickets down. Shoaib Malik and Asif Ali rode to the rescue at this point, putting up an unbeaten 48-run partnership.

In particular, Asif's contribution was whose back-to-back sixes in the 17th over put the Green Shirts on top again and enabling them to finish the game with eight balls to spare.

As we go to the press, Pakistan is preparing to take on neighbours Afghanistan on 29 October, who have proven their mettle in the game time and again despite being neophytes. The next two Super 12 games are likewise against neophyte teams Namibia (2 November 2021) and Scotland (7 November 2021).

Man Utd Coach Faces Uncertain Fate after Debacle

There are reports of dressing room unrest against Ole – although some say he will stay on after the humiliating loss to Liverpool.

The runners-up of the last Premier League, Manchester United have suffered a humiliating 5-0 thrashing at home against long-time rivals Liverpool this Sunday piling up pressure on Ole Gunnar Solskjaer. The win, which takes United to seventh in the league, moves Liverpool to second behind Chelsea following an astonishing display of management, coaching, and tactics under Jürgen Klopp who has managed to gather his 200th win as manager in fewer games than any other Reds boss.

Liverpool's Naby Keita opened the scoring with the first goal just 5 minutes into the game followed by Diogo Jota doubling the lead at 13'. It was a historic day for Liverpool's star Mohamed Salah as he scored a hat-trick at either side of the halftime assisted by Keita and Henderson. Salah has now scored 14 goals in just 10 games in all competitions this season becoming the first opposition player to score three goals at Old Trafford since Cristiano Ronaldo for Real Madrid in 2003, and the first-ever to do so in the Premier League.

The top-notch performance by Liverpool was light years ahead of Manchester United in every aspect of the game. As Ian Wright has critiqued, the Reds were "expertly coached" and "a million miles away" from Manchester United making this their biggest victory at Old Trafford.

While Roberto Firmino didn't get on the scoresheet, he certainly played his part in delivering a crushing victory for Liverpool. Alexander Arnold and Virgil Van Dijk showcased excellent footwork and assists along with a terrific pass by the captain Henderson for Salah's third goal leading the Reds to break records as this was the first time Man Utd lost by a five-plus margin at home since February 1955. It also marks as the ninth match for Man Utd without a clean sheet since September 1970 and February 1971 where they had their longest run of 10 matches without one.

Manchester United had injury doubts prior to the game over Bruno Fernandes, Fred, and Marcus Rashford as the trio sustained knocks during the Champions League tie against Atalanta on Wednesday. The center-back Raphael Varane also remained absent with a groin injury. The team showcased a lack of confidence and planning and encountered total humiliation after getting dismantled at the hands of Liverpool. Fans are demanding the removal of the MUFC boss, Ole Solskjaer, after witnessing Man Utd's heaviest home defeat since Oct 2020 when they lost 1-6 against Tottenham.

This performance titled as Man Utd's biggest embarrassment yet is likely to be one of the darkest days in the careers of the players and management both. While a strong defense is key to winning leagues, United's defense is highly in question as they were so easy to penetrate leading Liverpool to score 4-0 at the end of the first half. The captain Harry Maguire seemed in terrible shape himself and the two center-backs had their positioning horribly wrong with Maguire and Shaw colliding into each other before the second goal.



While we saw some stunning saves from De Gea and effort by Rashford and Cavani, the 20-year-old Mason Greenwood also served a swerving strike to land United's first shot on target on 29 minutes before being substituted for Paul Pogba who managed to make the disastrous performance even worse. After seeing a red card for a high tackle on Keita, who was taken off on a stretcher, Pogba was sent off 15 minutes into the second half leaving Man United 10 sided. Cristiano Ronaldo who had a goal disallowed by VAR due to offside also controversially escaped a red card in the first half after lashing out at Curtis Jones.

This display of inept defending, questionable tactics, and disorganized performance falls heavily on their manager, Ole Gunnar Solskjaer, who is facing calls to resign from his position. With 3 years in charge and still no teamwork, #OleOut has been trending on Twitter as many Manchester United fans are demanding the club to replace Solskjaer with the legendary French football player Zinedine Zidane. Others like Antonio Conte and Brendan Rodgers have also been linked to a possible takeover.

While the Norwegian said the loss is his "darkest day" as manager and described Sunday's game as "rock bottom", he seems confident about his future at the club saying he has "come too far to give up". When asked if he still had the backing of the board in his post-match press conference, Solskjaer replied that he is taking the club in the right direction and that "we have to look forward and make sure we go into the next training session and the next game with the right frame of mind against Tottenham."

Ole is credited with finishing top four in the Premier League for consecutive seasons but the pressure on him is higher than ever as it seems rather difficult for Manchester United to make a comeback having conceded 11 goals in three games and sitting eight points off the top of the league in just nine games.

By Ali Abdullah

Meet the Pakistani-American Woman Who is Among Forbes Next 1000

Eesha Sheikh became a healthtech startup founder while battling her past demons.



By **Kaukab Jahan**

When it comes to women empowerment, Pakistan gets on very low ranking because of highly patriarchal norms in society. But that doesn't mean that women are not fighting for their rights or taking part in businesses.

The most recent example is of Eesha Sheikh, a young Pakistani entrepreneur who has been featured in the esteemed 'Forbes Next 1000 2021' list.

Sheikh has developed a health tech app Playpal that assists people in defining their healthcare targets while playing them. Still in beta, Playpal has already racked up 100,000 downloads.

Established in 2017, her company, Playpal Inc., has raised around USD 2 million in funding so far. Behind her enterprising innovation is Sheikh's childhood struggle with clinical obesity.

"I was diagnosed with clinical obesity, at the age of eight", says Sheikh. "To fight with my obesity, my father ... offered me a deal of buying me new toys if I could lose 30 pounds. In months, my life pattern totally changed and I did everything I could to lose that fat.

"Moreover, my class fellows had also made every effort to bring me down. They threw my food to the floor and mocked me with the nastiest names. I continued to fight and in result, I ended up losing a total of 65 pounds by the time I was 10 years old."

By then, little Eesha had decided that she would never let any other child to go through the hell she had gone through. Years passed, and she lived with her dreams. An education in chemistry helped her in realizing her dream.

After graduation, Sheikh took part in a study on gamified health with John Hopkins from 2015 to 2017. "This study focused on the effect of incentives and gamified health on behavior change", says she.

"This study gave me the insight to put the puzzle together and Keeko was born." Keeko is a 2D combat shooter trying to save the world from the evil horde of junk food.

In 2017, Sheikh pitched the concept of Keeko to the Innovation Pavilion, Denver, Colorado. "The concept was approved and we put together the gamified health in retrospect to Keeko and Playpal."

"Playpal is a Digital Web and Mobile Platform that offers users an advanced health profile and preventative analysis by tracking, consolidating and analysing Physical and Cognitive Data from mHealth apps, games, devices, IoT and other third-party Integrations.

"We combine this analysis with our patented Health Score to guide users towards better health and to incentivise them with real-world rewards using the Digital Currency."

In simple words, Playpal is a Smart Health Analyst constantly telling you what you need to eat, how you need to sleep, when your vitals are going down, when they are coming back up.

In the process, it informs you how you need to be leading a day to day life to prevent yourself from becoming susceptible to disease, helping you be the best version of yourself.

Sheikh hopes to see Playpal become the largest Health Profiling and Connected Health System with the most diverse and secure Central Health DATA Repository.

Acting is a Side Hustle for Khalid Bin Shaheen

Meet Khalid Bin Shaheen, actor, model, producer, senior banker, and chief of the provincial censors.



By Khalid Farshori

Khalid bin Shaheen aka KBS is not only a senior and recognised actor and model but also a career banker who has served on key positions in Pakistan, the UAE, and Bahrain. He also tried his hand with production for a while. Currently he is based in Karachi and working as chairman Sindh film censor board.

KBS became the first Pakistani actor to play a major role in an Indian TV serial when he played a business tycoon in the serial *Dastan*, aired by UAE based Indian channel ZeeTV. Originally cast for five episodes of the serial, KBS hit a chord with the producers through his professionalism and stayed on for more than 130 episodes.

Another famous role he won fame for was that of Shehzada Saleem opposite Zeba Bakhtiar in the late 80s' PTV play *Anarkali*, after which he did more than a dozen super hit serials on both PTV and private channels.

An interesting fact about Khalid is that he is proud to be a part time actor and full time

banking professional in all his career. He did his BCom from St. Patrick's School Karachi, then won an MBA from International University Missouri, USA. He is a PhD in Banking.

Khalid bin Shaheen is currently working in several serials from private channels including the upcoming HumTV serial "kis mor per milay hu". Besides, he is set to make a special appearance soon in a Pakistani film.

Asked why he doesn't go into production, he said: "I have been in production off and on for the last 10 years. So far I have produced three serials, the last of which was a soap jointly produced with another producer. Since the experience was not good, I have no such future plans for serial or soap but I might produce a low budget film soon which is required in present circumstances to boost up the film industry".

He firmly said, "I never wanted excessive media activities as my profession for earning my bread and butter. It was never

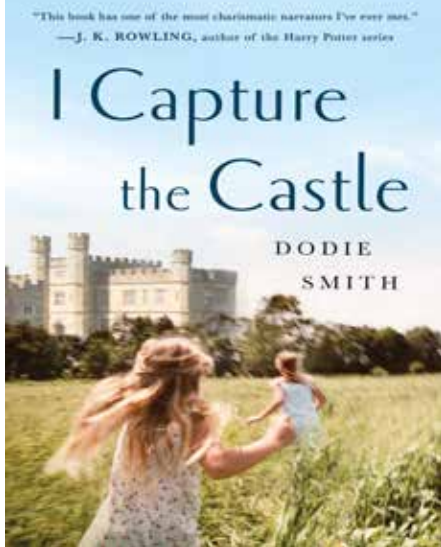
my goal. My goal was to be a top executive of a big organization and Alhamdulillah I have achieved most of my goals enjoying some very senior and top positions in financial institutions while some I hope to achieve soon."

Asked how his experience working as Chairman Sindh Film Censor Board, has been, KBS said: "After the 18th Amendment, we are not required report to the Central Board of Film Censors in Islamabad. We are an independent entity and have full authority in our decisions. Sindh Board of Film Censors has as its members six to eight very senior government and media personalities.

"The Board also includes members from ISPR and other agencies to ensure nothing is produced against the dignity of our beloved country and no controversial religious issue slips out. So many other sensitive issues are also kept in mind by our board members at the time of censoring any film."

I Capture The Castle

Author: Dodie Smith
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 84-9789-057-44
Number of pages: 352
Publisher: St. Martin's Griffin



I Capture the Castle is the first novel by the English writer Dodie Smith, composed during the Second World War when she and her significant other Alec Beesley had moved to California. She begged for home and composed of a more joyful time, unknown in the novel separated from a reference to living during the 1930s.

I truly adored this book and was very sad when it finished. The plot is sweet, charming and captures an irregular discovery. It is composed as a diary that has been styled as a novel, which is a somewhat confusing idea, yet which delivers the reader with an excellent, refreshing way of writing. I loved this style as I love journal writing and journal novels.

The characters are clear and individual, and I think truly interesting. I could relate with Cassandra with her gentleness and clumsiness. Each character is absolutely unique in their own way. I adored the hidden story of

Cassandra's dad, an author who kept in touch with one famous book then, at that point, after a short spell in jail, turned out to be curiously kept, writing nothing by any means.

This book was particularly awesome, fascinating and unusual. I felt like I nearly was Cassandra, since her confessions, reports and just her thoughts in her diaries gave me a careful understanding of her. I cherished how the different parts of the book was organized in different assessed journals, which makes the novel more fun and interesting to read.

I really enjoyed reading this book and it will definitely be one of my favourites because I could relate to it so much. I would recommend this book for teens and preteens mainly because they will have something to relate to and have fun reading it. I would also recommend my family and friends to read this book.

The borrowers

The Borrowers are tiny people who live in the secret places of old houses - behind the mantelpiece, inside the cembalo, under the kitchen clock. They borrow everything from humans, existing on the scraps they collect from the homes they live in 1970. In their tiny house, matchboxes open dressers and postage stamps hold tight the dividers like pieces. Whatever the Clocks need they basically "pick up" from the "human beans" who live above them. It's an agreeable life, however exhausting and boring in case you're a child. Just Pod is allowed to wander into the house above, on the grounds that the risk of being seen by a human is very unusual. Borrowers who are seen by people are gone forever. However, Arrietty will not listen. There is a human kid up there, and Arrietty is desperate for a companion.

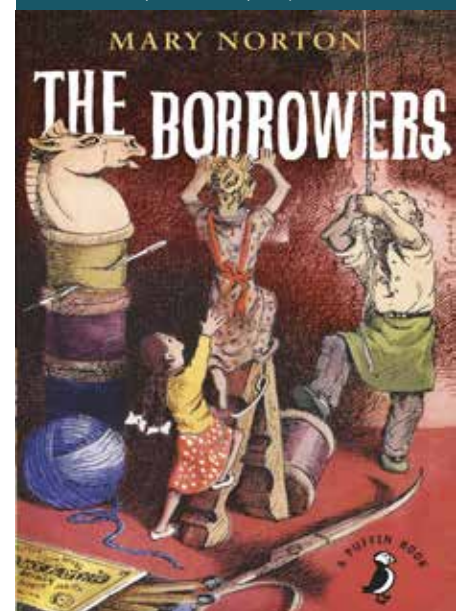
Arrietty Clock's father, Pod, is an expert borrower, able to scale curtains using a hatpin, and bring back a doll's teacup without breaking it. Girls aren't usually supposed to go borrowing, but Pod makes an exception for Arrietty, who can't wait to

explore the house and gardens that lie beyond her cramped home. But when she is at last allowed to accompany Pod on one of his borrowing expeditions, something terrible happens. She is seen by a human boy.

The story has many themes and takeaways. Unfairness is a constant thing in the book. The Borrowers do not like people and assume the worst about the boy. There are social issues at work. There is a class system in the Borrowers' world, where the place where you live determines your status. The Borrowers is very much a coming of age story. Arrietty learns that her parents can be wrong, and she progresses in the story as she matures.

This book is very well written and is very impressive. It is very joyous but has very complicated language and is very long. However, I still really enjoyed the book because of its interesting plot. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 9 because the story could be a bit complicated for young readers.

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Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 84-9789-057-4
Pages: 149
Publisher: J. M. Dent (first);
Harcourt, Brace (US)



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