

# The Truth International

15<sup>th</sup> - 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021

Sialkot Incident

A shameful act of individuals

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Opposition Protest Plan

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# The Ashes of Sanity

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Apparently, Pakistan sounds sane in the aftermath of the Sialkot tragedy, with all the major institutions, senior government functionaries, and religious leadership in unison denouncing the mob lynching of a Sri Lankan factory manager last week. How could a horrific act like burning of a foreigner alive on an unproven charge of blasphemy can take place in such a sane-sounding, 'normal' country? Or are we all feigning sanity? After all, the heinous act was not committed by a deranged individual; it was not the case of one crazy man, like the New Zealand mosque attack in March 2019.

In Sialkot, there were hundreds of people involved in killing an innocent foreigner; they were not ashamed of their crime, they showed no remorse later. They were convinced of their 'noble' act, evident from their interviews immediately after the ghastly act. With the body alight in the background, some of the self-proclaimed 'Ashaq-e-Rusool' even went on to take selfies. Police, reportedly, stayed away from the crime scene till it was all over. Can we spot any sign of normalcy or sanity in this episode? Or is it the first incident of this appalling nature wherein mob took the law in its own hand, became the judge and the executioner, and remorselessly killed a human being on a flimsy blasphemy allegation?

There is a pattern to it. Similarly shocking incidents have taken place in the past many a time and we as a society have been condoning that violence in the name of faith. Every time we loudly say

"we are shocked". But are we? This time around, we have expressed a bigger "shock". Is it because a foreigner from a friendly country is involved? Let's face it: this is neither the first nor the last incident of such grisly nature. There is huge historical evidence that makes it easier to predict that the Sialkot tragedy most likely will be repeated. This is no more an aberration; it's a norm. Mob violence in the name of religion has become a characteristic of our society. Obviously, we as a state and society, from civil and military leadership to the common man, directly or indirectly, have used the weapon of religion to achieve our short-sighted aims and objectives for a long time. Defense Minister Perviz Khattak's inappropriate statement on the Sialkot tragedy is a mere reminder of the general rationalization of crimes in the name of faith.

The country has not reached this level of radicalization overnight. We, as a state, have been mixing religion with politics from the very start. The Objective Resolution passed by the constituent assembly in 1951 was the first document that divided the country on communal lines, as it was opposed by all the minority members and supported by all the Muslim members but one. According to the Justice Munir Commission Enquiry Report in 1953 (on anti-Ahmadia movement), almost all ulema stated that the demand to declare Ahmadias as non-Muslims was a corollary to the objective resolution; and that this Resolution has made the Quaid's concept of a modern national

state as articulated in his August 11, 1947 speech, redundant. The rest is history.

The constitution was further 'Islamized' and distorted by Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Ziaul Haq for political expediency. The blasphemy law of Zia has all along been abused to settle personal vendettas both against Muslims and minorities. The Afghan Jihad and Kashmir Jihad strengthened the bond between the extremist groups and the state, leading to the birth of various violent/terrorist groups. Tehrik-e-Labayk Pakistan is the latest edition to the list of 'assets' created by the state over the years for its internal or external political ambitions. In the process, the society has been radicalized in a major way. The case of Mumtaz Qadri, the guard who, in the name of faith murdered Salman Taseer, explains it all. Later, Qadri's mammoth jannaza highlighted the fanaticism widespread in society. Ever since, the state, sensing an opportunity, have been nurturing them for its own myopic aims. From the TLP Faizabad Dharna to last month's protest march, the governments have been capitulating before violence.

Have we crossed the Rubicon? Is it already too late? What would wake us up, if the APS carnage couldn't? What happened to the National Action Plan, made with such enthusiasm and conviction? We are sitting on a time bomb that can go off any moment. Pakistan needs to be reimagined, from the school curricula to every walk of life. It is a 'Now or Never' situation.





# A Titans of Journalism Has Departed

*The nation and the profession can scarcely appreciate the enormity of the loss the passing of veteran journalist Muhammad Ziauddin represents.*

By Ahmer Kureishi



“Icon of Pakistani journalism”, “conscience of his profession”, “among the last of titans”, “the most capable and fiercely independent journalist”, and “unparalleled newsman” were some of the epithets used by those paying unreserved tributes to the dear departed.

Mainstream media and social media, politicians and civil society, academia and the citizenry – all joined in, paying their respects to veteran journalist Muhammad Ziauddin, who left for his heavenly abode on 29 November 2021.

The sad truth, however, is that however spontaneous and copious it may seem, this outpouring of homage scarcely does justice to the towering personality of the lamented luminary.

Born in 1938 in Madras, Ziauddin migrated with his family to Dhaka in East Pakistan in 1952, and later moved to Karachi in West Pakistan around 1960.

Over his long and illustrious career, Ziauddin served with all the major newspapers of Pakistan including The Muslim, The News, Dawn, and The Express Tribune and newswires including PPI (Pakistan Press International) and PPA (Pakistan Press Agency).

Although he went into a quasi-retirement after July 2014, when he resigned as the executive editor of a leading national English daily, Ziauddin continued to

freelance, his byline appearing in various publications.

All in all, Muhammad Ziauddin practiced journalism for about six decades and never once throughout this period was he known to compromise his principles – an impossible feat at a time and place where compromise is the rule rather than the exception.

His original beat was economy. He spent decades covering economy for leading English newspaper of the time, and won particular renown for the columns he wrote on the economy pages of Dawn.

In later decades, he shifted his focus to political commentary, especially on parliamentary proceedings. His Dawn column Press Gallery in particular won widespread respect.

But staggering as the sheer quantity of his work is, what distinguishes Ziauddin from the crowd is the quality and integrity of his editorial leadership. His code of honour was immutable and his work ethic missionary.

Those close to him recount innumerable instances of Ziauddin declining favours from the high and mighty. Equally, his professional colleagues tell of countless occasions when he refused to bend his rules to favour the high and mighty.

Some of the lucrative government positions offered to him from time to time include director general APP (Associated Press of Pakistan), chairman PEMRA (Pakistan Electronic Media Regulatory Authority), and economic advisor to the cabinet.

It is well known that he scrupulously steered clear of receiving any benefit from successive governments whether military or civilian. Small wonder those in government respected and feared him in equal measure.

But fearless as he was, fire and fury was not his style. Like the proverbial judge who

speaks through his rulings, Ziauddin kept his nose to the grindstone and let his work do the talking.

Muhammad Ziauddin was one of the pillars of progressive thought in his generation. It is thanks largely to him and his ilk that progressive ideas continue to be the mainstay of journalism even after all these years of political engineering.

As veteran politician Farhatullah Babar said in extempore remarks after his funeral, “The trophies he won as a professional journalist were vastly different [from] and immeasurably superior to the glittering medals worn on the chests.

“The trophies that came his way without his seeking indeed are intangible. Unlike the medals worn on chests, they never gather dust.”

Ziauddin was indeed a member of an increasingly rare breed of humans who put principles above financial gain and social clout. In an age when even highbrow journalism is indistinguishable from press agency and influence paddling, only his kind could speak truth to power.

An ominous aspect of his passing is its context – as his long-time friend Ghazi Salahuddin has alluded to in his obituary carried by The News International. It has come amid a season of unmistakable, accelerated, all-round national decline.

The chronicle of our national life is starting to look eerily like the final act of a Greek tragedy, with protagonists of good exiting the stage one by one, for one reason or another.

A tragedy in the passing of Muhammad Ziauddin is that the majority of people around – including some vociferously mourning his death – cannot truly fathom his greatness, and therefore the loss his departure represents both to the nation and the profession.

# Mohammad Ziauddin A fiercely Independent Journalist

By Amir Wasim



ISLAMABAD: Ziauddin was among the last of titans in journalism and newspapering world.

These were the words uttered by Farhatullah Babar, who is known as human rights activist more than his position as the PPP secretary general, after attending the funeral of veteran journalist Muhammad Ziauddin, who passed away early Monday morning after a brief illness. He was 83.

“The trophies he won as a professional journalist were vastly different and immeasurably superior to the glittering medals worn on the chests. The trophies that came his way without his seeking indeed are intangible. Unlike the medals worn on chests, they never gather dust,” remarked Mr Babar, who also has a journalistic background, while recalling a number of instances when Ziauddin flatly refused to get any favour from those in power throughout his “illustrious career” spanning nearly 60 years.

The most befitting description of late Ziauddin’s professionalism came from

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry who declared him as “the most capable and fiercely independent journalist” he had ever encountered.

Every ruler wanted to see Ziauddin in the interview panel only to provide some legitimacy and credibility to his or her actions, but at the end, they found themselves in deep trouble and fully exposed before the nation.

During the second tenure of Benazir Bhutto in 1994, once Ziauddin Sb and Ghazi Salahuddin reluctantly interviewed Asif Ali Zardari for state-run PTV and blatantly asked questions about the stories of his corruption. The interview was never telecast.

The journalists around the world still remember the incident when then military dictator Gen Pervez Musharraf during a talk at a think tank in London in 2007 got annoyed with Ziauddin, who was working as Dawn correspondent in the UK after getting retirement as resident editor of the daily, over a question about the safety of the

country’s nuclear assets and publicly called him a traitor.

In his recent interview to senior journalist Kamal Siddiqui published on the Samaa TV website, Ziauddin narrated the whole incident as to how later, while addressing the Pakistani community, Gen Musharraf recalled his altercation with him and instructed the audience ‘do-teen tika dain’ (slug him a few) if they saw him.

The next day all the major newspapers pegged their stories on the Ziauddin-Musharraf spat except Dawn because: “We are journalists and we do not become the story,” Mr Siddiqui quoted Ziauddin Sb as having stated.

Born in Indian city of Madras (now Chennai) in 1938, Muhammad Ziauddin had migrated to Dhaka, the then East Pakistan, with his family in 1952. He had obtained a bachelor degree in pharmacy from Dhaka University before moving to Karachi in 1960 where he did masters in journalism from Karachi University. He started his journalistic career as a junior

reporter in Pakistan Press Agency (which later became Pakistan Press International) in 1966.

In 1974, Ziauddin joined weekly Pakistan Economist and started doing reports on the subjects of finance and economy. In 1976, he became assistant editor of Morning News. However, he moved to Islamabad in 1978 and joined The Muslim as a member of the founding team of the newspaper.

Ziauddin had the longest association with Dawn, which he had joined as an economy reporter in 1982. And the very next year, he got APNS Award in the category of best investigative story for his report captioned "The untold story of IMF conditions" in which he had exposed the tough conditions attached with the IMF programme for the first time.

Through his hard work, he became the bureau chief of Dawn's Islamabad office in 1990, a position he held till March 2001, when he became the first resident editor of the newspaper after the launching of its edition from the capital. It was after him becoming the resident editor that the newspaper came out with special Economic and Business Review pages, known as EBR, which were later turned into Business and Finance.

Ziauddin, who is known as one of the pioneers in finance reporting, had also joined The News in 1994 but left the organisation within months and rejoined Dawn after developing some differences with the management and due to interference from the top in editorial matters. He worked as resident editor of Dawn Islamabad till 2005 and then moved to London to work as its foreign correspondent. He, however, returned to the country, mostly because of unsuitable weather conditions for him as he was a heart patient with asthma.

Ziauddin also worked as executive editor of Express Tribune from 2009 to 2014.

He was very pro-worker and also known as a trade unionist. He also held the office of assistant secretary general of the Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists (PFUJ) in the 1970s. Despite holding an executive office, he was always found among the working journalists and media workers during their protests on non-implementation of the wage board awards and on the issue of press freedom.

He had also served as president of the South Asia Free Media Association (Safma) that was established to promote networking among the media community, improve professional standards, facilitate journalists' exchanges and media trainings and undertake joint media productions in the region.

Condolences started to pour in from the country's journalist and media community, civil society and the political leadership with people paying tributes to late Zia Sb.

Senior journalist Mubashir Zaidi called Ziauddin an "icon of Pakistani journalism".



Human Rights Minister Shireen Mazari remembered him to be "a man of principles, polite in discussions and debates, never adopting an accusatory tone".

Political analyst Mazhar Abbas said Ziauddin was not only an "outstanding journalist" but also "an iconic figure and a guide for all the young journalists".

"Ziauddin sahib's struggle was not just against dictators; he put up with his fair share of irascible seniors and weak media owners .... By attempting to document some of these stories, I hope to remind the next generation of Pakistan's journalists that they can prevail," Mr Siddiqui had written in the introduction of the interview he conducted with Ziauddin Sb a few months ago.

Meanwhile, the PFUJ announced a three-day mourning, the union says it has suspended all activities for three days and that offices of the journalist body would hoist black flags to mourn the death of the veteran journalist.

In a statement issued on Monday, PFUJ president Shahzada Zulfiqar and secretary general Nasir Zaidi said the death of Ziauddin was not only a great loss for the journalist fraternity but also for all those who worked for rule of law, supremacy of parliament and upholding fundamental rights of all Pakistanis.

Dr Masuma Hasan, president of the Aurat Foundation, on behalf of the Board of Governors, senior management and staff of the organisation, expressed deepest condolences on the death of the veteran journalist, who was also a board member of the organisation. "Mr Ziauddin is

widely considered to be a teacher of teachers among Pakistan's contemporary journalists. He has left behind a legacy of speaking truth to power," she said.

With his departure, Pakistan's civil society and media industry have lost one of its leading and most well-respected advocates for human rights, democratic values, media professionalism and journalistic integrity.

The Trust for Democratic Education and Advocacy also condoled the demise of Ziauddin, who was associated with the organisation as its chairperson till his death.

Late Ziauddin has left behind a widow, two sons and two daughters to mourn his death. He was laid to rest at the Media Town graveyard. His funeral was attended by a large number of his old associates, journalists, politicians, members of civil society and Islamabad High Court Chief Justice Athar Minallah.

Courtesy Dawn



# Pakistan's Day of Shame

*There is little doubt this is the bitter harvest of the dragon's teeth sown by our own strategists.*



By Ahmad Waleed

"As you sow, so shall you reap," became the catchphrase on the social media when madness prevailed in a Sialkot sports gear factory where Sri Lankan general manager Priyantha Kumara was brutally murdered and his body was dragged out on the Wazirabad road to set on fire.

Kumara was kicked, clubbed and beaten to death by dozens of people while hundreds watched it happen except two of them who tried to save him from the packs of wolves. Many took selfies while many others were silent spectators. Nobody called police for his help.

The tragedy was one of those horrific incidents that jolted the whole country. Outrage poured in from the entire population except those who silently or openly advocate such actions in the name of religion.

It was indeed a day of shame for Pakistan, which had been struggling to control extremism after Taliban launched strikes in the every nook and corner of the country during the severest wave of terrorism the country ever faced.

It is being termed the outcome of the state pursuing the policy of harbouring extremist groups or extending support to the religious groups who have been campaigning against the hanging of Mumtaz Qadri – the police guard who assassinated former Punjab Governor Salman Taseer in Islamabad in 2010.

The assassination of Salman Taseer gave Khadim Hussain Rizvi, the leader of Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan, a tremendous rise. Ever since, the group, which has become a major political force, has been offering tough time to the respective governments through the never-seen-before lockdowns, blocking major arteries of Pakistan bringing the routine life to a standstill on mainly the issues relating to the blasphemy be it in Pakistan or anywhere in world.

The recent incidents of lynching or killing somebody for alleged blasphemy have shown that they have no links to a particular religious group. It is rather a criminal mind-set in the society where people take the law into their hands on the issues ranging from theft to blasphemy.

Two young brother Mughees and

Muneeb were lynched in the same city of Sialkot in 2010 in front of hundreds of people including policemen for alleged robbery. Mashal Khan, a student of Abdul Wali Khan University, Mardan, was lynched by students for alleged blasphemy in 2017 while in 2014 a Christian couple Shama and Shahzad Masih were thrown into a brick kiln for alleged blasphemy in Kot Radha Kishan area of Kasur.

It is a very complex issue that has remained unresolved for the last many decades. State has become hostage to the religious extremist groups who have been popping up every now and then to fan hatred and extremist agenda in the society against different sects and other religions on one pretext or the other.

Resultantly, the elements, especially the younger lot, tend to exploit the narratives of these religious extremist groups to the next extreme level.

Over 2000 people have been accused under the offences related to religion under the Blasphemy Laws since 1987 when the law was enacted during Martial Regime of General Ziaul Haq. According of Centre for Social Justice,



around 78 people, including Muslims and non-Muslims, had been killed extra-judicially after allegations related to blasphemy and apostasy, among them 42 were Muslims, 23 Christians, nine Ahmadis, two Hindus, and two persons whose religious identity could not be ascertained.

The incidents continue to take place every now and then. People take the law into their hands and misuse the blasphemy law even on a range of major or petty issues of theft or robbery or personal grudges and property issues, etc.

In several cases the allegations of blasphemy were hurled on innocent people to settle personal disputes. There are also reports of revenge in the incident of Sialkot as the Sri Lankan manager was tough taskmaster. The employees under him were not happy as they felt threatened about their jobs.

However, in case of two brothers Mughees and Muneeb, the mob got hold of the boys and accused them of a robbery in the same vicinity. The boys were lynched and their bodies were paraded on the major city roads of Sialkot.

In all such cases the law enforcement agencies have failed to respond as per their assigned duties whereas in the case of two brothers policemen were seen in the mob who were beating the innocent brothers to death.

The nation is touching a new low in the absence of corrective measures in place at the ground level. The youth bulge in Pakistan posing serious dangers to the society as they are falling prey to the extremist groups. They are directionless. They have no jobs.

The extremist groups are much more organised than the political parties in Pakistan. These groups have become a source inspiration to the youth due to lack of state policy to counter the rising radicalisation of the young minds.

A National Action Plan against terrorism was devised by the government after the Army Public School terrorist attack where 148 schoolchildren were killed by the terrorists in Peshawar in 2014. It was aimed at controlling terrorism besides giving protection to the minority groups.

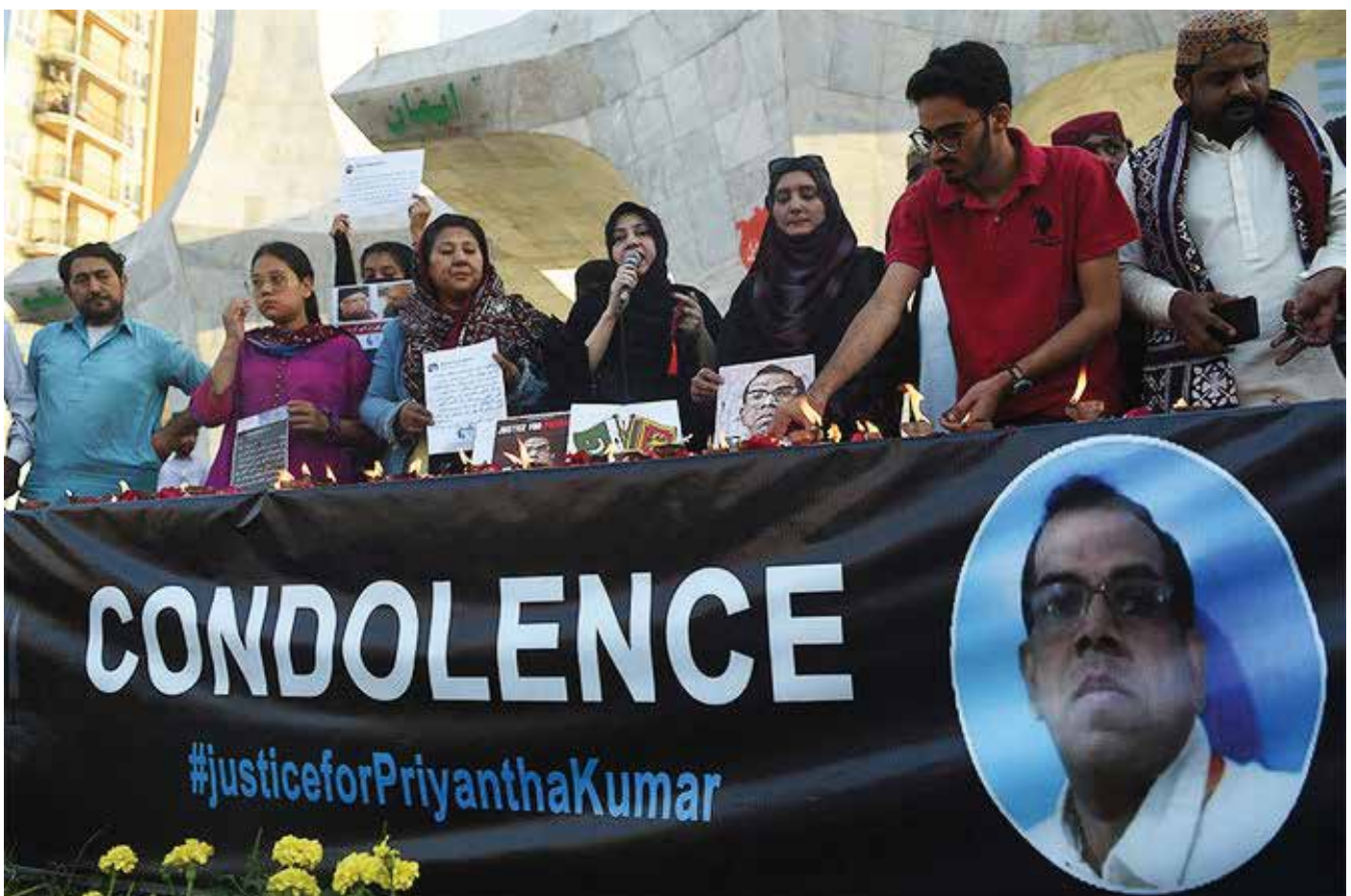
That the plan has remained dormant shows the level of seriousness of those at the helm in controlling the extremist approach threatening the very fabric of the society.

It is unfortunate that instead of decisively dealing with the militant extremists that have threatened the very woof and warp of our society, the authorities are seen cultivating and appeasing a new set of violent extremists. And this is being done in pursuit of narrow political gains.

It is no secret that Tehreek-e-Labaik is one such group that was used to destabilise the PML-N government in 2017 by allowing them to organise protests.

A radical overhaul has become the need of the hour to rein in extremist narrative at all levels. The Sialkot horror is yet another wake-up call for those holding the levers of our polity.

We are well past the time to retire the policy of planting dragon's teeth. We must listen to reason before it too late – always hoping it is not too late already.



# Are We Suffering from Collective Madness?

*We must pull back from the path of religious fundamentalism, not hasten on it.*

By Rana Azam

Whenever a tragedy like the recent outrage in Sialkot comes to pass, one cannot help but wonder if we as a nation have become a case of collective madness. This was neither the first of such incidents nor will it be the last. Not too long ago, our dear Mishal Khan became a victim of this rabid mentality.

Come to think of it, it does seem we have the makings of collective madness, but also that our condition is being exacerbated by certain quarters on purpose. Closer examination reveals four primary causes of this malady: (1) Ideological; (2) imperial; (3) military institutional role; and (4) socioeconomic conditions.

Socioeconomic conditions would be the number one cause in the Marxist paradigm, but we have deliberately put it last.

Secondly, we will consider these causes within the Muslim tradition. This is not to suggest other religions, whether Abrahamic or non-Abrahamic, are free of such problems. It is rather because being a Muslim society, Pakistan inevitably draws larger influence from the Muslim tradition.

## Ideological underpinnings

In the eighth century begins the Abbasid period, also called the Islamic Golden Age because of the spread of learning and literature that it saw. In this period sprang Islam's Mu'tazila school of thought that laid great emphasis on rationalism.

Partly influenced by ancient Greek philosophy and in particular by Aristotle, the Mu'tazila emerged around the time when Greek philosophy was being translated into Arabic in Baghdad. Characterized by the emergence of the great Muslim philosophers Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, Razi, Avicenna, and Averroes, this is the period of Muslim enlightenment.

The Mu'tazila were challenged by the Ash'aris, whose leading light Al-Ghazali vociferously opposed the enlightened views of the Mu'tazila. The Muslim enlightenment was short-lived – not least because it challenged state and raised questions.

This is why the Mu'tazila suffered heavily at the hands of the Muslim elites. The cruel treatment meted out to these enlightened Muslim philosophers will forever haunt those who have the slightest association with learning. This cruelty was precisely why the Mu'tazila movement was so short-lived.

On the other hand, steeped in conservative thought, the Ash'aris were allowed to flourish. Perhaps there were other reasons for this.

For instance, Averroes, the last great exponent of Muslim enlightenment was Andalusian while Ghazali was Arab. It was perhaps natural that while the former left deep impression on European thought, the latter reigned supreme in the Islamic realms centred on the Arab heartland. Another reason could be the social backwardness of the Arab lands.



The mantle of the conservative thought soon passed to Ibn Taymiyyah, and it morphed it into fundamentalism. Ibn Taymiyyah is thus the originator of Islamic fundamentalism that continues to plague Muslim societies around the world to this day.

In subsequent centuries, fundamentalism progresses through thinkers like Hassan bin Sabah, Muhammad bin Abdul Wahab, Syed Qutub, and in the subcontinent, Maulana Maududi.

Referred to as the Salafi movement in its various forms, the fundamentalist thought has left a deep and wide-ranging ideological impressions on Muslim societies around the world. As an exponent of fundamentalism, Allama Iqbal is in the league of Al Ghazali.

## Imperial influences

When we look upon the imperial influences that have contributed to the current state of our society, we find deep colonial and neo-colonial stimuli at work. In particular, some events that took place around the time of the World War I are seminal in this respect.

The dissolution of the Ottoman caliphate was one such event, leaving a deep impact on Indian Muslims as well. The Arab lands liberated from Ottoman control gravitated into the orbit of the British and later American imperialism.

The discovery of oil in the Middle East, the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 comes to pass, and the breakout of Israeli-Palestinian conflict are also seminal events. World War II would engulf the world a mere two decades after WWI.

By the time WWII subsides, Britain has been consumed by the two world wars. Its role as the leading imperial power ends and the United States of America takes its place. Soon enough, the imperial powers would the need to curtail Soviet influence and the Cold War erupts.

This is when promotion of fundamentalism in the Muslim lands is undertaken by imperial powers and their local lackeys as a deliberate project. Europe including Britain becomes the junior partner of the US in this enterprise.

Britain feels obliged to withdraw from the subcontinent and other colonies. But before it retreats, the imperial power sows the seeds of discord in its former colonies including the subcontinent.



The Muslim elites of the subcontinent were wary of democracy, under which the Muslims would be a minority compared with the Hindu majority. Their interests are threatened. The subcontinent is therefore partitioned into two countries – the Muslim Pakistan and the Hindu India.

In Muslim countries, imperial powers depend on local anti-people institutions to advance their interests. In Iran, Dr Musaddiq's popular government is sacked and the Shah is put in-charge. He is assigned the role of the policeman of the region including the Arab lands and Pakistan. Baathist governments in Egypt and Iraq are likewise crushed.

## Military institutional role and socioeconomic conditions

Now we return to Pakistan and in particular its western flank that is today's Pakistan – because the erstwhile East Pakistan plays no particular role in this game.

The regions that constitute today's Pakistan after the partition of the subcontinent are backward and have feudal or tribal societies. With the exception of the Quid-e-Azam, Pakistan founding fathers are not only feudal by pedigree, but also steeped in feudal culture and ideology.

More than seventy years later, those archaic ideas still hold sway in Pakistan.

Soon after the demise of the Quaid-e-Azam, Liaquat Ali Khan leads the passage of the Objectives Resolution through the legislative assembly, which is not only inimical to the people's sovereignty but also lays the foundation for the rise of fundamentalist thought in Pakistani state and society.

At the same time, Pakistan becomes a strategic partner and ally of American imperialism. One thing leads to another and Pakistan soon finds itself under the yoke of military's institutionalised dictatorship after Ayub Khan seizes power.

This sets in motion the process of purging the society of any residual traces of enlightenment. The Council of Islamic Ideology is instituted to lord over parliament and further down the line, Zia-ul-Haq sets up the Federal Shariat Court to put paid to parliament's independence.

Meanwhile, the military establishment coins a security state's narrative and starts to seize control of Pakistan's financial resources. We see two Indo-Pak wars before finally the general election of 1970 takes place, and the military establishment refuses to accept the results. What followed is now history.

Bhutto, who rose to power in the remaining Pakistan, had a historic opportunity to cut the military to size, but he squandered this opportunity and paid for it with his life. He was a political opportunist who paid lip service to socialism but appeased and nurtured fundamentalism at every juncture.

Zia-ul-Haq seized power on 5 July 1977. Months later, after Afghanistan's Saur revolution led by Nur Muhammad Taraki took place, Zia put Pakistan at the head of the Afghan Jihad project, joined by the United States, Saudi Arabia, and others.

As part of the project, Pakistan becomes the base camp of holy warriors ferried from the Arab lands to fight the soviet-aligned revolution in Afghanistan.

Salafi and Deobandi seminaries financed by Saudi petrodollars proliferate across Pakistan to initiate the Pakistani youth in the ways of jihad. Socially backward and economically destitute Pakistani parents willingly enroll their sons.

The charismatic jihadi ideologue Osama bin Laden, whose Al Qaida would later turn the world upside down, was among the fighters brought to these shores as part of the project, which continued unabated for about ten years.

These ten years saw Zia-ul-Haq build fundamentalism and extremism to such enormous strength in the country that the only viable path left to the leaders who came after him, whether elected or military strongmen, was to pay obeisance to religious fundamentalism one way or the other.

However, to lay blame for the proliferation of fundamentalism in our society on Zia alone would be unfair. We have seen with our own eyes how our current crop of generals has spawned and reinforced the Labbaik movement over the past few years, just to keep the country's civilian leadership under its thumb. And we plainly see them continue on the path, indifferent to the wider repercussions of the policy.

Our political leadership has played its own part in nurturing the monster out of sheer opportunism. Consider the posters used by Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP), deemed the most liberal political party, in a recent Lahore by-election.

The lengths to which the party goes in its eagerness to woo the Labbaik mind-set is incredible. It has styled Bhutto as a warrior of Khatm-e-Nabuwat. The slogan inscribed above Bhutto's picture in the poster says, "Labbaik Ya Rasool Allah – Mujahid of Khatm-e-Nabuwat, Shaheed Zulfikar Ali Bhutto".

The question facing us as a nation is what can we do to exorcise our state and society of the demons of rabid extremism? Will a ban on such extremist organisations be enough? Our answer is no. Nothing short of recasting Pakistan in the image of a democratic, secular republic will work. The separation between state and religion will have to be enforced before the use of religion as a political tool can be prevented.

The current political dispensation, however, is taking the opposite path. Schools, colleges, and institutions of higher learning are being turned into religious seminaries and powerful civil and military figures are falling over each other presenting themselves as champions of Islam.

This must end, for in that direction lies destruction, not salvation – as Sialkot demonstrated quite adequately. Equally important, the military must be limited to its constitutionally mandated role, and Pakistan must break with American imperialism.

What is more, the window of opportunity to enact the requisite reform is quite narrow. We must act before it is too late – unless of course it is already too late.

*Writer is affiliated with Awami Workers Party.*



## Machinery Breakdown

*The Sialkot outrage raised too many questions for comfort.*



By M A Niazi

**T**he killing of a Sri Lankan, Priantha Kumar Diyawadanage, for alleged blasphemy has raised a number of demons, some old, some new, which have made the incident more of an emotive event than it seems to be.

There has been a lot of emphasis on the fanaticism implicit in the lynching, but there has not been enough of a look at the class dimension. The murdered man was a manager, and thus of a different social and economic class from the mob that killed him. The class divide is further stressed by the information that emerged, that the mob wanted to go after the factory owner.

Economic times are hard. Not only do the workers find it difficult to get by on their salaries, but the fact that the government has failed to create the jobs it promised means that worker's children do not find jobs as they grow up. That knowledge is enough to cancel out any relief afforded by their still having a job themselves. This knowledge is made more painful by any

sacrifices that might have been made to ensure that those kids got an education better than their father's.

While there is a definite class dimension visible, trade unionism or Marxism has not taken advantage it seems, but religious sentiment. This does make a certain sense, for it means that workers finding it difficult to go on making ends meet, and seeing no improvement in the long-term future, are turning to a Higher Power, the Almighty, to solve their problems.

This is where the connection between the religious parties and ordinary people becomes visible. People's problems are mundane, like making a living, a child's wedding. Even an apparently abstruse problem, such as what happens after one dies, is immediate for someone who faces the prospect of dying in the next few years. Religious parties generally do not have any solutions.

The danger is not that Pakistan might be

seen as soft or hard on blasphemy, but it might be seen as inefficient, unable to protect foreign nationals.

Be that as it may, there was another development in Sialkot, which took religious parties to a new level. The murdered man is accused to having taken down posters of the Tehrik-e-Labaik Pakistan. Blasphemy has generally been a nonpartisan offence so far. This is the first time it has been associated with a particular party. This creates a dangerous precedent for all parties. Religio-political parties have a reputation for street power, based on the seminary students it can bring to rallies, but they have never used this street power for violence. The same cannot be said about the Jamaat Islami's student wing, the IJT.

The example of the IJT might serve to illustrate the lack of tolerance of opposing views that such parties might show. The IJT, if strong enough, does not tolerate opposing parties' posters or programmes. It does not object to campaign material, only

organisational material. The election laws prevent any person using religious sanctions against anyone opposing them, such as a candidate threatening anyone voting against him, or for some other candidate, with hellfire. This is a restriction dating back to the British era, and to the 19th century, when electorates might have been limited, but were joint, and the hurling of anathemas would not just have been inter-sectarian but inter-communal.

There may have been a communal undertone, with good Muslims resenting being ordered around by a foreigner who was also a Buddhist, but the Muslims showed their superficial knowledge of their own religion by burning the body. Burning is not part of the permitted methods of execution. Burning is perhaps the only method of punishment specifically forbidden by the Shariah. There are certain hud punishments, which have been specified. Stoning to death is prescribed for the adulterer, but ordinary execution for the murderer. The murder may not be burnt, because that is a punishment reserved by the Almighty for Himself, when He casts sinners into hellfire on the Day of Judgment.

Blasphemers are to be executed, and the Qazi is left to decide the method, but burning is not one of them. Nor is beating to death. While not forbidden, that does not sound like something a state would do. Such means as beheading, hanging, electrocution, lethal injection would be possible. The purpose is execution, not to precede the dread event by any form of torture.

Who was the bright spark who thought of burning the body?

After execution, the body is supposed to be

handed over to the heirs, who may deal with it according to their religion. Only in the event of an armed robber, who is to be crucified after execution, does the Sharia deal with the disposal of the corpse.

There is one story doing the rounds which may well be even more disturbing if true. That is, the dead man was actually placed in the factory as a foreign lender, and there was a conspiracy to scare him. Unfortunately, it went wrong.

If the stories about the TLP being backed by certain quarters are true, recent events should indicate that religious sentiments cannot be played with to achieve limited ends. Things can go wrong. Actions motivated by religious sentiments can go wrong. The reason is the difference in intention. The manipulator may simply want a party to have its vote split, while the person or group manipulated wants to stop blasphemy.

At a certain level, playing with such sentiments is inviting trouble. Sialkot tragedy shows that people do not have confidence in the justice system, or the government. It is supposed to punish offences, in order to prevent the law being taken into private hands. Blasphemy is to be punished by the state, because private persons are likely to take the law into their own hands.

It should be noted the incidents justifying the death sentences for blasphemers were cases where Muslims heard of the blasphemy, went off and killed the blasphemer, and then presented themselves before the Holy Prophet (PBUH). Much later than Prophetic times, there was a major blasphemy crisis in Cordoba, where over the course of nine

years between April 850 and May 859, 48 Christians committed very public blasphemy and were executed. The authorities did not like what was happening, but had to act, not just because they were outraged, but because Muslim sentiment was inflamed. The spate of blasphemy, which was motivated by the desire to attain martyrdom, only came to an end when the Bishop of Cordoba, who was behind this movement, himself committed blasphemy and was executed.

Pakistan has to face up to the reality that people do not trust the state to punish blasphemy. The authorities of ninth-century Cordoba may have been under pressure, but they were able to get the Muslims to go along with them because they took action. Unfortunately, accusation is assumed to prove guilty because the justice system is seen as bowing to foreign pressure. The justice system is not trusted overall, and blasphemy is another example of this.

Apart from the law and order issues, there are foreign entanglements. Sri Lanka has been wavering between India and China, which considers it crucial to the maritime portion of its One Belt One Road initiative. One result was its growing closer to Pakistan, one sign of which was the increase in the number of Sri Lankans working in Pakistan's textile sector. China will be very interested in how Pakistan handles this case, as its own citizens were killed while working on the Dasu hydro-electric project, with arrests still to be made.

The danger is not that Pakistan might be seen as soft or hard on blasphemy, as that it might be seen as inefficient, unable to protect foreign nationals.





# TTP's Return to the Battlefield

*The development can potentially complicate life for both the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan.*



By Haq Nawaz Khan

The unilateral declaration by the leadership of Afghanistan-based TTP (Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan) to end a month-long ceasefire comes as a setback to the Afghan Taliban, who had brokered the talks to help bring the Pakistani militant group back to the fold.

The Pakistani Taliban, who have traditionally used Afghan territory to launch attacks inside Pakistan, consider themselves one with the Afghan Taliban and pay allegiance to their supreme leader.

Pakistan used to blame India and Afghanistan's Ashraf Ghani government for sponsoring the militant group – although the US-backed Kabul regime had put many TTP leaders behind bars.

When the Afghan Taliban took over Kabul, Pakistan hoped to resolve this issue through peaceful negotiations, expecting the Afghan Taliban to pressure the group into compliance or take action against it.

The Afghan Taliban leadership on its part is facing pressure from within the movement to side with TTP, as the group had hosted and provided fighters to fight the international forces in Afghanistan for nearly two decades. Pakistani Taliban had lost many of its top commanders to US drone strikes.

According to the current calculus, if the de-facto rulers of Kabul push the TTP too hard, there is a risk the Pakistani group may join the Islamic State in Khorasan (ISK), who are emerging as a major security challenge in parts of the country.

Though Afghan Taliban tend to brush aside ISK as a serious threat, claiming it has been almost eliminated. In a latest Interview with the Anadolu Agency, Zabihullah Mujahid claimed, "Daesh is no longer a big threat in Afghanistan. It was a small group that has been dismantled in Kabul and Jalalabad."

He said 670 members of ISKP have been arrested, and 25 hideouts of the

group destroyed in the capital Kabul and Jalalabad, Nangarhar province.

Reports say the United States of America has offered to the Taliban to help jointly fight the ISKP or Daesh, but the Taliban have declined the offer, claiming they can tackle the Daesh on their own.

The ISKP has carried out some major terrorist attacks in Afghanistan, with hundreds of people killed and wounded. The eastern Afghan province of Nangarhar is believed to be a stronghold of the group. The group has also reportedly claimed some of the target killings on the Pakistani side of the border.

While Pakistani Taliban style themselves as part of the wider Pak-Afghan Taliban movement, some elements within the group have been close to the ISK philosophy on the sectarian side. In the past, some senior commanders of the TTP are known to have joined ISK.

While TTP may not pose a serious



threat to either Pakistan or Afghanistan, it may create some unrest in the region.

In a media statement, TTP spokesman Mohammad Khorasani accused the Pakistani government of violating the ceasefire. "In the prevailing circumstances, we cannot extend the ceasefire." "Tehreek-e-Taliban has respected the ceasefire, but security forces have conducted operations against mujahideen in Gandapur area, Lakki Marwat, Swat, Bajaur, Dir and Swabi. Some prisoners were released, but later arrested."

The statement further said, "The Islamic Emirate played a mediator role, but Pakistan information minister called it "facilitator. Both sides agreed to form 5-members committee from either sides, but the government committee did not arrive at the decided venue to date".

Khorasani said it was agreed Pakistan would release 102 prisoners, but that has not happened. He also pointed the finger at Pakistan for its support to the US-led invasion of Afghanistan. The statement gave a laundry list of past peace deals, and causes of their failures.

Sources aware of the developments told The Truth International (TTI) the Haqqani Network played an important role in bringing the TTP leadership to the negotiating table.

The Haqqanis are a powerful Afghan Taliban faction led by the acting Taliban Interior minister Khalifa Sirajuddin. It hosted direct talks between the TTP and Pakistan government delegations in the Khost province since 25 October 2021.

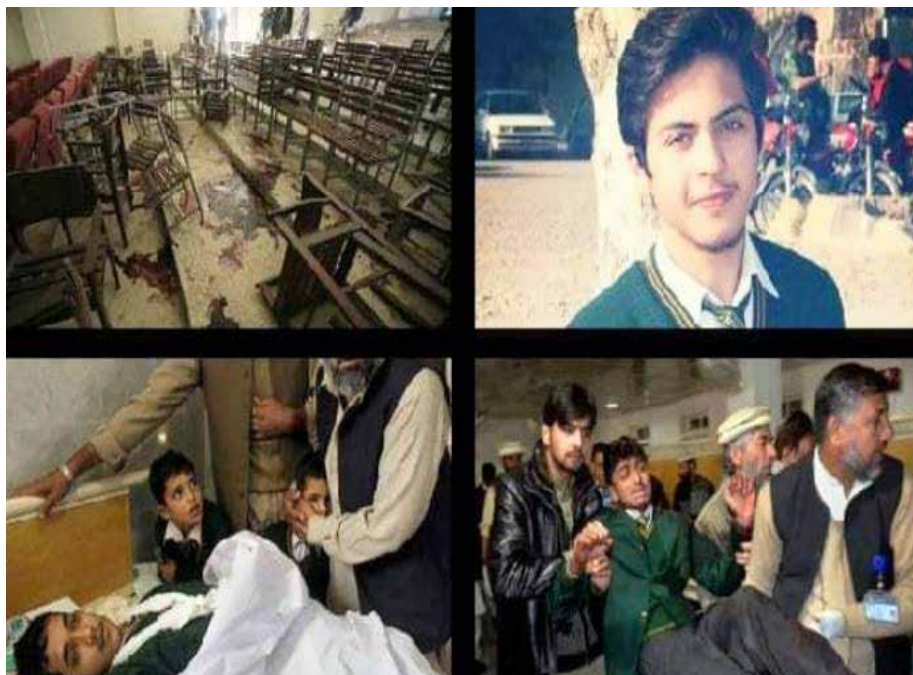
However, it is not known who represented Pakistan in the talks. The matter came to the limelight when the Prime Minister Imran Khan told a state-run Turkish television TRT, about the peace talks with the Taliban.

It was a surprise for many and the government was criticized for holding talks with the group that has shed so much Pakistani blood. Parents of the children of the Army Public School Peshawar were up in arms and the Supreme Court of Pakistan summoned Prime Minister Khan to explain his government's position.

Some analysts believe the intervention of

the apex court had slowed down the process and no developments have taken place since then.

The Afghan Taliban are facing multiple challenges on political, economic and security fronts since assuming power in the mid-August this year. The world is closely monitoring the situation and pressing Kabul to fulfil its commitments made in the 2020 Doha peace deal.



The leadership of the Taliban has been assuring the world that it has been fully committed to implement the peace deal, but the world is not yet satisfied. Unlike the past, the Taliban have been engaged through diplomatic channels.

The international community has been asking the Taliban leadership to form an inclusive government with representation from ethnic and political groups, and giving women due share at the top political level. Protection of women's rights and girls' return to schools are also key sticking points.

However, the Taliban have their own point of view on the issues. They have been asking the world to recognize their government as it has fulfilled all the conditions needed for a sovereign state.

The delay in the international recognition has brought the Afghan economy to standstill. Afghanistan has always been running through foreign aid. Almost 75 percent of the Afghanistan public expenditure has

been met via foreign aid for decades.

"International trade, which was around 8 billion dollars in the past, has come down to almost nothing due to the sanctions", Kabul based economist Professor Dawood Niazi told TTI. "The taxes have also declined as there are no imports. The collections of customs duties and taxes are not enough to run the administration."

As part of a global humanitarian initiative, the governments of Holland and Germany have recently pledged to pay salaries of the school teachers in Afghanistan. Other countries including the US have pledged to provide humanitarian aid to Afghanistan to avert the humanitarian crisis.

Islamabad has until now been the Afghan Taliban's biggest benefactor, leveraging all diplomatic channels to help ease the situation for the de-facto rulers of the country who stormed into Kabul on 15 August 2021.

The TTP's rejection of talks may throw a spanner in the works, creating further difficulties for the already cornered Afghan Taliban, who stand to lose a crucial ally at this critical juncture if Islamabad views this development in light of a betrayal.

However, time alone can tell how it will play out in the long term. As we go to press, Islamabad is yet to respond to the TTP announcement.

# Taliban regime and international recognition



By Umer Farooq

Afghan Taliban are not essentially familiar with the need for international diplomatic recognition an isolated state needs in order to survive in the international system. But this lack of understanding doesn't really obviate the requirement of international acceptance of the Taliban regime in Kabul by world powers. The Taliban regime's international legitimacy is dependent on international recognition. Rather the state of Afghanistan will not have any international character if it is not recognized by the leading powers of the international system and regional powers. Keeping ambassadors in foreign countries and maintaining embassies there, seats in the United Nations and its status as recipient of international aid, donations and grants, all these privileges are dependent on diplomatic recognition.

At present several countries are maintaining diplomatic staff in Kabul but none has so far recognized the Taliban regime in Kabul. Americans are engaging Taliban in talks and Europeans have hinted at keeping a diplomatic presence in Kabul without formally recognizing the regime. Pakistan is assisting the Taliban in developing the capacity to govern the war torn country, but

so far has been less than generous is not extending formal diplomatic recognition.

China and Russia are keeping many channels of communication open with the Taliban regime but even they have not extended diplomatic recognition. What exactly are they waiting for? Experts believe that the world is still in doubt whether the Taliban regime will survive the winters? The second question for which the world needs an answer is what the Americans will do with the Taliban regime?

American pragmatism in foreign policy is exemplary in the world of international politics. The US foreign policy establishment sometimes goes against the grain of their ostensible policy objectives and inclinations. For instance, after India committed the ultimate sin of exploding nuclear bombs in May 1998 and thus crossed the international non-proliferation rules set by the United States, it appeared that the two countries' paths had diverged decisively. Within months, the then Clinton Administration started wooing New Delhi and its subsequent journey to the point of civil nuclear deals between Washington and New Delhi was a story of

the pragmatism of US foreign-policy-making institutions and leadership.

Consider another example of this pragmatism. There was a point in the post-2010 years when the US security apparatus was convinced that Pakistani military and intelligence services were working against Washington's interests in Afghanistan via intelligence assistance and providing sanctuary to the Afghan Taliban. But not for a day did the US administration allow its military and security institutions to discontinue their close cooperation and interaction with the Pakistani military establishment. That the US continued close cooperation with the Pakistani military and intelligence services was another story of the pragmatism of US foreign policy establishment in conducting diplomacy in our region.

In the first story of pragmatism above, there was a strong non-proliferation lobby in Washington advocating punishment for New Delhi. In the second story of pragmatism, there was a whole network of lobbies and powerful US media suggesting strong action against the Pakistani security establishment for their support of the



Taliban. In both cases, successive US administration's ignored powerful lobbies and continued to interact with important and crucial players in South Asia, keeping in view the larger foreign policy interests as defined by US foreign policy establishment: Firstly, in the case of India, these were that India was the largest democracy and largest economic market in South Asia, a key counterweight to China. In the case of Pakistan, the Pakistan military was perceived as a larger stabilizing force in the region with its pro-American military leadership that is immersed in Westernized political values and interests.

The reason I made this point at the start of this piece is to put forward my point that it is only a matter of time before Washington and its key allies will come to the point where they will start making efforts to establish working relations with the Taliban regime in Kabul. American pragmatism will bring them to this point.

Two factors will facilitate Washington's possible drift towards a pragmatic policy towards the Taliban. Firstly, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in July this year meant that this was the first time in more than two decades that the US would not have any kind of military presence in the region, starting from the shores of the Indian Ocean and up to the steppes of Central Asia. Pakistan reportedly denied bases to the US military in the wake of their withdrawal from Afghanistan. China and Russia are opposing tooth and nail the re-establishment of US bases in Central Asia. Secondly, US officials have been hinting at the possibility of resumption of counter-terrorism strikes in Afghanistan to check the re-emergence of Sunni extremism and militant groups in Afghanistan.

Here again, the US would have to pick from the two available policy choices emanating from New Delhi and Islamabad. Now, Islamabad seems to be selling the perception that the Taliban could be trusted partners in the fight against Sunni militancy in the region. New Delhi is advocating the very opposite. The latest of its efforts is the nine-member conference on Afghanistan in New Delhi, reported as follows.

"India on Wednesday hosted a regional summit to discuss the ongoing situation in neighboring Afghanistan following the fall

of the democratically-elected government and the subsequent Taliban takeover of the country. The conference is being chaired by India's National Security Advisor (NSA) Ajit Doval and his counterparts from Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan are at the attendance."

Not surprisingly, these are the same countries which attended a security conference of regional intelligence chiefs in Islamabad. Pakistani Intelligence Chief hosted the conference in which the regional implications of the Taliban takeover of Kabul were discussed. It was agreed that the security apparatus of these seven regional countries would provide timely intelligence information to the Taliban regime so that it could

met Central Asian officials in New Delhi on the sidelines of this conference and later the Indian media reported that there was significant convergence of threat perceptions as far as Afghanistan was concerned.

For American pragmatism to become operational there is a strong requirement that the Taliban regime persists and survives. In this situation survival would mean two things: firstly they should be able to ensure that they succeed in containing and controlling the violence within their borders and should not allow it to spill over into neighboring countries. This seems an unlikely outcome on account of the complete lack of capacity and expertise on the part of the Taliban to technically tackle the violence as a national government. Secondly, international experts are



take control of Afghanistan and would not allow violence to spill over into neighboring countries. The perception was that the Taliban could act as a bulwark against more radical Sunni militant groups that were gaining a toehold in Afghanistan's northern and eastern parts. Obviously, the source of this perception was the Pakistani security apparatus which had clear inclinations in support of the Taliban regime.

Now it seems that these regional countries don't completely agree with this perception or that they don't want to put all their eggs in one basket. The Taliban movement itself is a source of threat and it could not be relied upon as a trusted ally against more radical Sunni groups. Such is the message coming out of New Delhi. Indian officials

predicting a humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan—food shortages and Covid spread—and mass exodus of the population out of the country. Both these situations will generate social, political and military pressures which an inexperienced Taliban regime is unlikely to survive.

But suppose they do, after all, survive? In that case, we may see American traditional pragmatism forcing the Biden regime to establish working relations with Kabul.

Whatever the case may be, for Pakistan, the Taliban will continue to pose a deadly political problem—that is defined by a lethal internal security threat and cultural influence which can push our society into a Dark Age of its own.



# Pakistan's Scramble to Organise Response to the Afghan Crisis

*Pakistanis – and more importantly Afghans – desperately need the OIC to get its act together.*



By Zainab Umer

In a last-ditch effort to help orchestrate an effort to help avert a looming human disaster of biblical proportions in Afghanistan, Pakistan is hosting an extraordinary meeting of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC).

The meeting comes against the backdrop of United Nations aid agencies and independent charities warning half the population of Afghanistan is at the risk of starvation.

In attendance at the session will be delegations from the P5 (the US, UK, France, Russia, and China) as well as the European Union – in addition to 57 member countries of the OIC.

On the agenda will be ways and means to avert the looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan, dealing with the refugee situation, and bringing peace to the country.

Foreign Office told an Islamabad presser this week talks were underway to invite the Taliban, adding that it was yet to be decided that in what capacity the Taliban would be invited. He, however, opined that the

presence of Taliban representatives was necessary.

Addressing a separate presser at Islamabad last week, Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi said the situation could trigger further chaos in the war-raged country.

"To abandon Afghanistan at this stage would be a historic mistake," said Qureshi. "Instability could give way to renewed conflict. It could trigger an exodus of refugees."

UN and other humanitarian organisations have been airing frantic calls for sanctions on Afghanistan to be eased to help avert the humanitarian crisis brewing in the country with its economy teetering on the verge of collapse and the bitter Afghan winter setting in.

But all such calls have apparently fallen on deaf ears in western capitals. The flow of international aid remains cut off since the August takeover of Kabul by the Taliban, and billions of dollars in Afghan assets held abroad remain frozen, leaving the country's

banking system in paralysis.

Pakistan recently agreed to allow 50,000 tonnes of wheat to transit through its territory from India to help Afghanistan but aid agencies have warned that much more help is urgently needed.

Pakistan has sent millions of dollars' worth of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan in October and again in November. Islamabad also agreed to allow humanitarian assistance to be trucked through the country purely as a gesture of goodwill to the people of Afghanistan despite soured ties with New Delhi.

## Four decades of neighbourly assistance

The history of Pakistan's willing help to the people of Afghanistan dates back to over four decades ago, when civil strife in that country first began. At the height of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan hosted over 1.4 million registered and almost one million unregistered Afghan refugees.

The large-scale influx of Afghan refugees was triggered following the Saur Revolution 1978 and subsequent Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Soon after their entry into Afghanistan, the Soviets imposed military and social reforms along with initiating land reforms that troubled tribal leaders.

They implemented economic measures that worsened conditions for the poor, and tried to curb ethnic uprisings by mass arrests, torture, executions of dissidents, and aerial bombardments, according to a November 2001 Amnesty International report.

In order to resist the Soviet invasion and implementation of Marxist ideology in Afghanistan, the United States soon developed linkages with Pakistani intelligence to recruit and train guerilla fighters, known as the Mujahadin, to put up a resistance against the Soviet army.

The question remains as to what had forced Afghan citizens to flee their home country. Afghans have suffered more than 40 years of conflict, natural disasters, chronic poverty, and food insecurity and most recently the COVID-19 pandemic.

Unfortunately, the 10-year civil war in Afghanistan caused a drain on the country's economy and led many Afghans to flee to the neighbouring country Pakistan, where many remain. As the Soviet-Afghan War began, many Afghan citizens began to flee the country.

The ensuing decade of violence at the hands of Soviet forces encouraged thousands more to follow, escaping what some considered to be "difficult, if not impossible, situations," which included the threat of mass arrests, executions, attacks on public gatherings, the destruction of Afghan infrastructure, as well as the targeting of Afghanistan's agricultural and industrial sectors.

"We left Afghanistan mainly to protect our lives," a low ranking Afghan police officer named Muhammad, fled from Afghanistan along with his wife and five children, was quoted as saying by the New York Times.

The Pakistani government welcomed Afghan refugees with open arms, granting them rights to work and live and a substantial amount of freedom whilst living in the country. However, this warmth began

deteriorating in the mid-1990s as Pakistan experienced economic sanctions along with pressure on services, labor market and an increase in terrorism and crime rate in the country.

Afghan refugees residing in Pakistan remain under the protection of UNHCR. In 2018, UNHCR's work in Pakistan included working with the authorities to give refugees access to health and education services, strengthening social unity between refugees and their host communities, as well as helping refugees who decide voluntarily to return home.

Where Pakistan does provide refugees and asylum seekers some access to social services, they give these refugees neither official status nor the right to legally work in the country.



The Pakistani government had decided to provide Afghan refugees proof of registration cards with biometric features. This enabled Afghans to move freely in the country.

These cards also gave the refugees temporary legal status but did not grant them the right to formal education, work in the formal sector, the right to buy property. In some cases, these people were also deprived of the simple right to access public health-care.

A government department, the Chief Commissionerate for Afghan Refugees (CCAR), was established and given the duty of managing Afghan refugees in Pakistan along with providing them access to education and employment in the country.

## Policy change

Pakistan's refugee policy has changed drastically over the years. Originally, the nation utilized "terms from Islamic discourse to justify welcoming refugees."

The reasons for this warm welcome are multiple, the main reason being that Afghan refugees began moving to Pakistan in massive numbers at the height of the Afghan-Soviet war. Pakistan at the time was receiving vast amounts of military aid from the US, which was being used to arm and train soldiers to fight the Soviets.

During this time, UNHCR introduced a number of programs that aimed to provide microcredit, skills training, and employment opportunities to both Afghan refugees and their Pakistani hosts, helping many of the former become self-sufficient.

This support, coupled with humanitarian aid, helped "soften the blow" of hosting millions of new people. This then begs the question as to why Pakistan's warm welcome gradually became cold despite the aid the country was receiving.

In 1995, food aid from UNHCR and the World Food Programme (WFP) was suspended, and broader international aid decreased. According to researchers, the data on humanitarian financing during this time is limited, although it appears that flows varied from USD 24 million in 2000, to USD 41 million in 2001, down to USD 18 million in 2002.

Naturally, the Pakistani government began fretting about the strain these refugees were putting on the country and its economy.



Akhtar Mengal, the leader of the Balochistan National Party, asked the rhetorical question in 2018: “When we are unable to provide jobs to our own people, how can we carry the burden of refugees?”

The recent fall of Kabul and the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan forced thousands of Afghans to flee the country and mostly by taking desperate and dangerous measures. Countless Afghans stay at risk of being targeted because of their previous association with coalition forces, Afghanistan’s former government, international development programs, media, civil society, and other organizations promoting human rights.

Women and girls who have lost access to education and employment also feel they have to leave the country.

The United States warned neighboring countries that by the end of the year half a million Afghans could flee the country and the neighboring countries should keep their borders open.

According to BBC, more than 123,000 civilians were evacuated by US forces and its coalition partners after the Taliban took control of the capital on 14 August 2021, but it is unclear exactly how many of those

were Afghan nationals.

The US has said that it flew nearly 80,000 civilians out of Kabul and of those, about 5,500 were Americans and more than 73,500 were either Afghans or other foreign nationals.

The UN in the midst of this crisis has called on its members to support Afghan people in their hour of need by giving asylum seekers shelter but while some countries have offered refugees a safe haven, others have indicated they will not be giving sanctuary to those fleeing the crisis.

According to BBC, the US ambassador said “We are already overburdened by the refugees, and it is beyond our capacity to host any more refugees.”

Iran has refused to give sanctuary to any new refugees despite repeated calls from the UN. Iranian authorities are sending tens of thousands of Afghan refugees back over the border, aid agencies and witnesses say, amid allegations of mistreatment by Iranian authorities.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) found that just over one million Afghans have been sent back this year, including more than 28,000 Afghans in the

last week of October, despite the dire conditions awaiting them.

Similarly, Pakistan refused to hold any more refugees, Pakistan’s government says it has reached its limit and cannot accept more Afghan refugees as the threat of violence looms in Afghanistan.

National security advisor Moed Yusuf said in an interview, “If such a situation arises, then the United Nations refugee agency, UNHCR, should set up camps for the refugees on the Afghan side of the border”.

## New crisis, new response

But that was back in July – and it is difficult to see how Pakistan can stand by and watch if aid groups’ worst fears about Afghanistan are realised this winter. In fact, Islamabad has already thrown open its border crossings to allow entry for Afghans who have a visa as well as people in need of emergency medical assistance.

If the upcoming OIC foreign ministers’ conclave delivers on its promise, Pakistan will have remained true to its long tradition of standing by the people of Afghanistan in the hour of need.





# Afghan Taliban reject TTP claim of being a 'branch of IEA'

*The development can potentially complicate life for both the Afghan Taliban and Pakistan.*



The Afghan Taliban have distanced themselves from the banned Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) after the latter recently claimed it was a "branch" of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) — the regime in charge in Kabul.

TTP chief Mufti Noor Wali Mahsud, in a video available on social media and purportedly shot during his visit to Pakistan's northern areas, had declared that his outfit came under the larger "umbrella" of the IEA.

"Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan is a branch of Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, [and] is a part of that umbrella on this land," Mahsud, flanked by armed TTP fighters, can be seen saying in the video as he addressed a group of men.

Afghan Taliban spokesperson Zabihullah Mujahid, in an interview with Arab News on Friday, rejected Mahsud's claim of affiliation with the IEA.

"They are not, as an organisation, part of IEA and we don't share the same objectives," Mujahid is quoted as saying by the publication.

"We advise TTP to focus on peace and stability in their country. This is very important so they can prevent any chance for enemies to interfere in the region and in

Pakistan. And we request Pakistan to look into their demands for the better of the region and Pakistan."

Mujahid said the TTP was Pakistan's internal matter, adding: "The IEA stance is that we do not interfere in other countries' affairs. We do not interfere in Pakistan's affairs."

## Ceasefire — beginning and end

The Afghan Taliban spokesperson's remarks come roughly a month after Afghanistan's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi acknowledged that the Afghan Taliban were mediating between Pakistan and the TTP on the desire of both the parties.

The Afghan Taliban's facilitation of talks had led to a month-long ceasefire during November, which the TTP declined to extend any further, accusing the government of failing to honour the decisions reached earlier.

A statement issued by the TTP on Thursday gave out details of the six-point agreement that it said it had reached with the government under the aegis of the "Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan" (IEA) on Oct 25, 2021.

The two sides, according to the agreement,

had accepted that the IEA would play the role of a mediator and that both sides would form five-member committees each which, under the supervision of the mediator, would discuss the next course of action and demands of each sides.

Both sides, it said, had also agreed to observe a month-long ceasefire from Nov 1 to Nov 30, 2021 and that the government would release 102 "imprisoned mujahideen" and hand them over to the TTP through the "IEA and that both sides would issue a joint statement regarding the ceasefire on Nov 1, 2021".

According to the statement, the government not only failed to implement the decisions reached between the two sides but on the contrary, the security forces conducted raids in Dera Ismail Khan, Lakki Marwat, Swat, Bajaur, Swabi and North Waziristan and killed and detained militants.

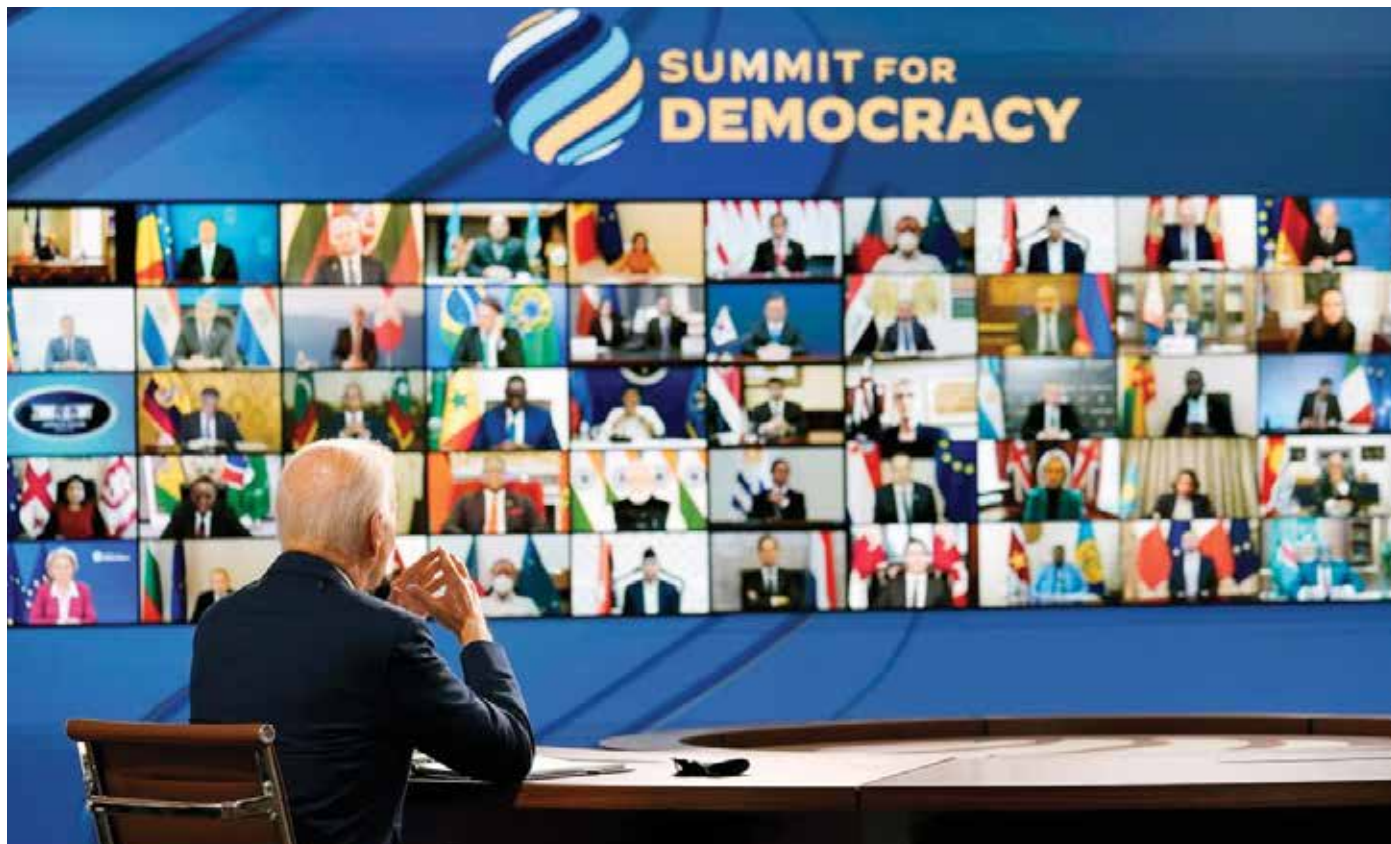
"Under these circumstances, it is not possible to extend the ceasefire," the TTP said.

The TTP decision to end the ceasefire is a big setback to the government's efforts to secure a peace agreement with the militants waging war against the state for decades.

Courtesy DAWN

# Summit of Handpicked Democracies

*President Biden's initiative may well have pushed the world a notch closer to a coming world war.*



By Dr Khalid Bajwa

President Joe Biden's Summit of Democracy was mired in controversy even before it began. While it has been attended by more than 100 world leaders along with private sector and civil society representatives, it will be defined by who the organisers left out.

Many countries of the world have been left out, among them outright autocracies as well as some who claim to be democracies. The world has been divided into invited and not-invited, democratic and non-democratic and among the democracies between good guys and bad guys. Although the White House denies such discrimination, many in the rest of the world have an opposite view on this matter.

It is believed that the criteria of invitation was not about the credentials of democratic values of the country but geo-strategic considerations of the United States.

The list of invitees consists of credible democracies along with back sliding

democracies, like Brazil, India, Philippines, and Poland, and the democracies that are democratic just in name.

According to the Freedom House's 2021 report, some of the countries have such a low scoring that calls for concern.

The other important factors that played important role in the selection of invitees, are regional context, demographic considerations, and the balancing act among enemy nations.

It has been feared that some of the countries whose democratic credentials are just in name may take it or project it as success. However, the US is adamant that nothing of the sort would be allowed to happen and the countries with bad record on democratic values will be encouraged and pushed to improve the situation.

The objectives of the Summit include 'defending against authoritarianism, fighting corruption, and promoting human

rights'. The next year is the 'year of action', when all will be invited back to report how they fared in achieving these goals.

The US considers it important to further the cause of democracy and Biden is optimistic for summit's positive results. These positive results need coming out not only from the rest of the world but also from the US.

It is important as this summit is taking place for fulfilling Biden's campaign promise to bolster democracy in the face of what has been happening in the US for the last many years. Even more recently, the attempts to change or changed electoral playing field in different states will have profound effect on the quality of American democracy.

The US is already considered as a backsliding democracy and has lost its position in Freedom House ranking significantly. If what is happening in different states of the US had happened in any other country, the US would be raising hell cry and threatening to impose sanctions on that country.



This brings in another criticism of the credentials of the US being host of the democracy summit. It is asserted that the US is an inadequate host for the summit.

The big concern is that the pursuit of these objectives with the help of cherry-picked players may result in ideological rift and warfare which would not be good for peace and harmony in the world.

It is clear that the US is engaging with only half the world. How it engages with the other half is something that will be closely watched.

Many people see this summit in the light of the US's containment of China policy and revival of cold war. The US's policies in the Pacific Rim, South China Sea, and the formation of Quad with special emphasis on anti-China stance give credence to this point of view.

This is why many Asian-Pacific countries have responded to the summit rather cautiously. They cannot antagonise a very powerful neighbour. They would like to engage China as well as US but not one on the cost of other.

There are certain important omissions like Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore, and Vietnam from South-East Asia, which the other countries of the region cannot ignore. These omitted countries are important regional countries whose cooperation is a must for any meaningful solution to the regional conflicts and issues like unhindered access to navigational waters in the region.

Every region of the world has inclusions and exclusions that is baffling for the world and needs explanation. The scope of the democracy summit in future may be expanded with the participation of even non-democratic countries. Another way forward could be holding of regional satellite meetings to achieve cohesive policies on human rights and corruption without indulging in ideological frays.

As for democracy itself, it is under attack from various directions. It is facing both internal and external threats.

The biggest threat to democracy is failure in reining in populist trends in democratic societies. The people are being exploited by

the leaders for their emotions and deprivations. Bogeymen are conjured to stir hate and anger for the sake of securing votes.

This has happened before in the earlier parts of twentieth century and has been repeated in different countries in various garbs throughout the history of democracy. This trend is gaining more traction in recent past and there is lots of backsliding on democratic norms.

Religion, race, and nationalism are the main tools used by populist leaders to fan hatred among various segments of the society. This is happening almost everywhere. The minorities in all forms and shapes are subject to this hatred and violence.



It has also been witnessed that elections in the powerful countries bring death and destruction to certain parts of the world as leaders and the rulers try to secure the election victory by enhancing the threat perception of the population from the weaker nations.

They are subjected to military action and occupation on false pretexts. Such tactics may secure an electoral victory for the leaders of the democracies but destroy the case for democracy in the world. To assume that people cannot see through such smoke-screens is only naïve.

Would the summit take up such issues and discuss them in a democratic manner without incurring wrath or even displeasure from the big players would be worth watching.

President Biden is right in saying that 'democracy does not happen by accident,

we have to defend it, strengthen it, renew it'. He needs to show how the US and its allies are going to secure the future of peace and democracy. He must make sure that this summit heals the rifts rather than opening up old and inflicting new wounds.

He ought to kick-start a process to heal the fissures within American society and bring it to normality that is so essential for healthy democratic practices. This must be done if America ever wants to lead the so-called free world again. He must work to provide conducive environment to seed and nurture democracy.

Leaders everywhere need to understand that there are pre-requisites for a successful

democracy in any society. Without fulfilling these pre-requisites democracy remains a dream.

As for Pakistan, its invitation to attend the summit brought greatest criticism. Most of the big media houses, think tanks and other influential critics in the West lambasted Biden and US administration for inviting Pakistan.

This should be a wake-up call for Pakistan. It seems the world is bent upon proving Pakistan a Pariah state. Even if we consider it as an ill-founded criticism of the state of democracy, corruption and human rights in Pakistan, Pakistan has a fight on its hand and should tread very carefully in the coming months and years.

Declining to attend the summit by Pakistan will have its consequences. One can only hope that those at the helm have mulled over the options before making the final choice.

# All Hail the Republic of Barbados!

*A new era of peoples' sovereignty began as the sun set on the British Empire on this Caribbean island.*



## Desk Report

When the sun rose on 1 December 2021 in Barbados, it shone on a self-sovereign republic with no colonial bonds whatsoever remaining with any foreign power.

The new era of Barbadian peoples' sovereignty was formally heralded at the stroke of midnight the previous night as the Royal Standard was lowered and the new Presidential Standard raised in its place.

Hundreds of people lining Chamberlain Bridge in the capital, Bridgetown, cheered as Carol Roberts-Reifer, chief executive officer of the National Cultural Foundation, made the declaration of Barbados' transition from constitutional monarchy to constitutional republic.

Dame Sandra Mason was sworn in as the first President of the new-born republic and

a 21-gun salute was fired as the national anthem of the Republic of Barbados played.

Prince Charles, heir to the British throne, represented the Queen at the ceremony. On her part, the Queen wished all Barbadians happiness, peace and prosperity in the future in her gracious message to President Mason.

"On this significant occasion and your assumption of office as the first president of Barbados, I extend my congratulations to you and all Barbadians", said the Queen. "As you celebrate this momentous day, I send you and all Barbadians my warmest good wishes for your happiness, peace and prosperity in the future."

Barbados has now ceased to be a Commonwealth realm, but is expected to maintain membership in the Commonwealth of

Nations, like Pakistan and some Caribbean neighbours.

The development has given new hopes of full sovereignty to republicans in some fifteen other former British colonies still under symbolic rule by the British monarch.

The Australian Republic Movement congratulated Barbados "on marking this important step towards full independence," said CNN quoting its national director Sandy Biar. "Barbados shows this can be done while maintaining a amicable relationship with both the British monarchy and the United Kingdom".

The move is largely symbolic: Barbados enacted internal self-government in 1961 and gained full independence on 30 November 1966, retaining the British



monarch as the ceremonial head of state.

But this symbolism is huge for the people of the Republic of Barbados – many of whose ancestors suffered under atrocious colonial rule under Spanish, Portuguese, and British control.

Prince Charles was mindful of this painful heritage when he said in his solemn speech at the ceremony: “The creation of this republic offers a new beginning. From the darkest days of our past and the appalling atrocity of slavery, which forever stains our history, people of this island forged their path with extraordinary fortitude.”

Inhabited by Kalinago people since the 13th century, and prior to that by other Amerindians, Barbados was occupied by the Spanish in the late 15th century, who claimed it for the Crown of Castile. The Portuguese Empire claimed the island between 1532 and 1536, but abandoned it in 1620.

An English ship, the Olive Blossom, arrived in Barbados on 14 May 1625 and took possession of the island in the name of King James I. In 1627, the first permanent settlers arrived from England, and Barbados became an English and later British colony.

During this period, the colony operated on a plantation economy, relying on the labour of enslaved Africans who worked on the island’s plantations. The slave trade to the island continued until it was outlawed by the Slave Trade Act 1807, with final emancipation of the enslaved population in Barbados occurring over a period of five years following the Slavery Abolition Act 1833.

Barbados’ present-day population of 287,000 is predominantly of African descent. Even though it is in the western part of the North Atlantic, Barbados is closely associated with the Caribbean and is ranked as one of its leading tourist destinations.

Struggle for republicanism has been long in Barbados, facing setback after setback until finally the government of Prime Minister Mia Mottley delivered it this Independence Day (30 November 2021).

The Mottley government announced on 15 September 2020 that it intended to become

a republic by 30 November 2021, the 55th anniversary of the country’s independence. Speaking on the occasion, she argued that after over 54 years of independence, it was time for Barbados to “fully leave our colonial past behind.”

On 27 July 2021, the Day of National Significance in Barbados, Mottley announced that Barbados’s cabinet had decided that Barbados would become a parliamentary republic by 30 November.

The Day of National Significance commemorates the labour riots of 1937, which were part of the wider British West Indian Labor unrest of 1934–1937, that



eventually made the British government acknowledge the poor conditions endured by much of the population of the Caribbean colonies.

“The time has come to fully leave our colonial past behind”, Governor-General of Barbados Sandra Mason said in her 2020 Throne Speech. “Barbadians want a Barbadian head of state.”

On 20 September 2021, just over a full year after the announcement for the transition was made, the Constitution (Amendment) (No. 2) Bill, 2021 was introduced to the Parliament of Barbados.

Passed on 6 October, the Bill made amendments to the Constitution of Barbados, introducing the office of the President of Barbados to replace the role of Elizabeth II, Queen of Barbados.

The following week, on 12 October 2021, incumbent Governor-General of Barbados Dame Sandra Mason was jointly nominated by the Prime Minister and Leader of the Opposition as candidate for the first president of Barbados. She was subsequently elected to the office on 20 October.

The process culminated in the formal declaration of the republic on the night of 30 November 2021.

In her first address as president, Mason said, “Possessing a clear sense of who we are, and what we are capable of achieving, in the year 2021, we now turn our vessel’s bow towards the new republic. We do this

so that we may seize the full substance of our sovereignty.

“For decades, we have had discourse and debate about the transition of Barbados to a republic. Today, debate and discourse have become action. Today, we set our compass a new direction.”

It was befitting, then, that the ceremony showcased the rich Barbadian music and dance. A highlight of the ceremony was pop star Rihanna attending – and being designated a national hero. A huge roar of celebration erupted at the announcement.

Prime Minister Mottley told the star: “May you continue to shine like a diamond and bring honour to your nation by your works, by your actions” – in a reference to the singer’s 2021 hit song “Diamonds.”

# To Thousands of Latino Migrants, Trump is Still President

*Why Biden keeping Trump's racist 'Remain in Mexico' and 'Title 42' policies is a huge political bungle.*



By Haider Rifaat

In an unfortunate turn of events, President Joe Biden has failed to measure up to the high moral standard set by Candidate Joe Biden concerning the matters of those fleeing persecution. Even worse, he seems to have allowed President Trump to return and rule in the affairs of immigrants coming from Mexico.

After a series of debacles, starting from Kamala Harris' politically insensitive "do not come" remarks to Guatemalans to Biden ordering removal of Haitians from America, his administration has started to look as tone deaf and heartless as its predecessor in matters concerning immigration.

As if these political failures were not disappointing enough, the Biden administration has now decided to restore Trump's racist "Remain in Mexico" policy, also referred to as Migration Protection Protocols (MPP).

The decision came into effect following the Trump-nominated US District Judge Matthew Kacsmaryk requiring Biden to reimplement the policy.

The policy posits that people seeking asylum would be required to stay in Mexico until the court provides verdicts on their cases. The waiting period for these cases may take up to several months, which further casts a shadow of despair among minorities trying to escape persecution.

Migration Protection Protocols officially came into effect in 2019 under the Trump administration. According to The New York Times, Trump forced nearly 60,000 asylum seekers to stay in Mexico while their cases were processed – a move that jeopardized thousands of lives at the hands of corrupt and violent groups.

Real-time data by Human Rights First

indicates that people have died in the past after being sent back to Mexico while their cases were processed.

A Salvadoran asylum seeker was executed in Tijuana in November 2019 after the Department of Homeland Security sent him back under the Remain in Mexico policy.

A 19-year-old Cuban was shot dead in May of this year just a few days before his case was to be processed.

Human Rights First also reported that more than 1,500 incidents of rape, kidnappings and torment have been recorded following expulsion of Mexicans at the border.

Considering the data, it is evident that the policy puts families in harm's way. Perhaps a hidden agenda of the Trump government was to deliberately hold off thousands of families in Mexico, and have their lives



compromised in an effort to prevent them from entering the US.

The world is already witness to Trump's sheer dislike for Mexicans, so the theory holds merit. Here is a man who campaigned to build a wall on the US-Mexico border. He also went on record, saying, "They're (Mexicans) are bringing drugs. They're bringing crime. They're rapists. And some, I assume, are good people."

It is unconscionable that the current US government would proceed with the reenactment of Remain in Mexico policy considering that Biden himself discontinued it soon after assuming office.

It is equally ironic because he ran on the promise of rebuilding America's broken immigration system. In fact, Biden strongly opposed Migration Protection Protocols last year. In a tweet, he wrote, "Donald Trump's 'Remain in Mexico' policy is dangerous, inhumane, and goes against everything we stand for as a nation of immigrants. My administration will end it."

The reemergence of this policy means the

Biden government is violating its campaign promise to help immigrants lead better, securer lives in the US. What is particularly surprising is President Biden's inability to strongly negotiate and confront the supporters of the two controversial immigration policies, which makes him seem more un-presidential.

On top of being barbaric, this policy also violates an individual's right to seek asylum. According to International Rescue Committee, the US Congress implemented components of the Geneva Refugee Convention, including the definition of a refugee, into the US immigration law.

The NGO adds that asylum is a form of protection granted to people who can prove that they are incapable of returning to their country on account of persecution on the basis of race, religion, nationality, membership in a particular social group, or political opinion.

It argues that if Mexicans or Haitians fleeing persecution are denied entry into the US, the government is violating their right to attain asylum.

Another Trump policy, which affects immigration, is Title 42. It is currently in effect under President Biden. Title 42 makes seeking asylum in the United States more challenging for individuals.

According to Amnesty International, more than 7,647 violent attacks have been recorded against people expelled to Mexico. Under Title 42, the Biden administration got rid of 8,000 Haitians this year, despite knowledge of Haiti's sociopolitical crisis.

In light of these major developments on the watch of President Biden, it appears as if Trump's racist policies will continue to influence America's fragmented immigration system.

The US is in dire need of forming a comprehensive, all-embracing immigration system that would fast-track asylum statuses and grant asylum seekers their right to security. Consigning these matters to racist policies foisted on Biden by a Trump appointee would not only be morally inept politically incorrect, it would also be detrimental to thousands of families fleeing terror and hardship.





# Korean Culture and Music Night

To celebrate the culture of Korea and to delight in its traditional music, the Embassy of Korea organized a Korean Night in Lahore at the Pearl Continental Hotel. Over 120 high level dignitaries were in attendance and the art, culture and music was specially themed to portray the popular Korean drama, Squid Game. Korean high schoolers volunteered specially for this particular event while the embassy staff dressed up in uniforms to display a true Squid Game like feature. This event is testament to the rising interest of Pakistanis in Korean art and culture as well as across the world - owing specially to the hit Korean dramas that have taken the world by storm. Speaking on the occasion, then Ambassador expressed hope that this would serve as a building block towards stronger ties between Pakistan and Korea.









# Sexual Abuse Allegations Rock Australian Politics

*A damning report on sexual abuse has spurred the Morrison administration into action, but will it be enough?*



## TTI Report

Power and privilege have a corrupting influence, even in the hallowed halls of a parliament – as established beyond doubt by a damning report recently published by the Australian Human Rights Commission (AHRC).

But even more damning is the apparent reluctance of political leaders to act against wrongdoing when reported for reasons of optics. According to this diseased mentality, an evil hushed and allowed to flourish is preferable to an evil talked about and dealt with.

Nevertheless, there is threshold after which this hush-hush approach starts to be counterproductive. For Prime Minister Scott Morrison, that threshold was reached by the publication of this report that said a majority of people working at Australia's parliament had suffered sexual abuse.

Days after the publication of the report, Prime Minister Morrison said Education Minister Alan Tudge agreed to stand aside pending an investigation into sexual abuse allegations brought against him by a former employee.

Rachelle Miller alleges she had experienced bullying and intimidation during her consensual relationship with Tudge in 2017.

Mr Morrison had declined to investigate the matter when the allegations first surfaced last year, claiming it had occurred before his tenure as prime minister. What is more, Mr Tudge was promoted into cabinet in 2019.

Apparently, the publication of the parliamentary report has changed his calculus. He was quick to emphasise “this action in no way seeks to draw a conclusion on these matters”, but admitted it was the appropriate action for him to take under the ministerial standards.

Mr Tudge's former press secretary, Ms Miller had made their consensual relationship public a year ago. Revealing fresh details, she said there had been a significant power imbalance in their relationship and she had felt completely under his control.

“The bullying, intimidation, harassment I experienced from him at work completely

destroyed all of the confidence I had in my ability. I did not believe I'd find a job anywhere else. I was breaking down in tears regularly,” she said.

Ms Miller further said she felt “blacklisted” from other jobs within the ruling Liberal party after her split with Mr Tudge.

On his part, Mr Tudge says he “completely and utterly” rejects the allegations.

## Set the Standards

The Australian Human Rights Commission's Report on the Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces, the Set the Standard report was authored by Sex Discrimination Commissioner Kate Jenkins. Filed by Australian parliament on 30 November 2021, it sought the contributions of 1,723 people and 33 organisations.

“Over half (51%) of all people currently in Commonwealth parliamentary workplaces (CPWs) have experienced at least one incident of bullying, sexual harassment or actual or attempted sexual assault in a



CPW. That is unacceptably high,” Ms Jenkins said in a statement.

In particular, the study found that women in CPWs and female parliamentarians have experienced sexual harassment and bullying at a higher rate. Members of Parliament (Staff) Act experienced the highest levels of bullying, and actual or attempted sexual assault, in CPWs, as well as high levels of sexual harassment.

Ms Jenkins said, “We found current systems and reward structures encourage, tolerate and enable misconduct and processes that are not equipped to prevent or address the consequences of that behaviour”.

The report makes 28 recommendations to support all parts of parliament to make them comply to standards on Australian workplaces.

“In designing the recommendations, we have balanced the need for clear standards, and an independent complaints body to enforce those standards, with the need to establish professional systems and processes to support people and bring this workplace into line with other Australian workplaces,” Jenkins said.

In response to the report, Prime Minister Scott Morrison has conceded “practical and cultural changes are necessary” to make Parliamentary workplaces safer. He outlined three steps to achieve the said goal.

As a first step, Finance Minister Simon Birmingham and Special Minister of State Ben Morton have been tasked to consult

with the opposition, minor parties, and independents for a response to the review.

The second step requires the Department of Prime Minister and cabinet to provide resources and support needed by the multi-party approach on the issues.

The third step will see the continuation of existing supports in such cases. This includes the dedicated unit of support staff, independent complaints mechanism, 24-hour support line, and the workplace safety training.

“These important supports will keep running and adapt as necessary as Parliament responds to these recommendations,” said Mr Morrison. “Every single Australian has a right to feel and to be safe at work”.

Activists and watchdogs are gunning for swift and concrete action. Michele O’Neil, president of the Australia Council of Trade Unions, said the federal government should implement the recommendations if it really wants real action for women.

“The Prime Minister must do his part by urgently adopting the recommendations and providing the resources required to implement them,” she said in a statement.

Victoria state’s public sector gender equality commissioner Niki Vincent said, “This last couple of years ... have really highlighted the issues of sexual harassment and its relationship to gender inequality,”

Ms Vincent, who is investigating workplace sexual harassment in 300 public organizations, including universities and local

councils, further said, “Any organization that is not on alert around sexual harassment these days is burying its head on the sand and is being rather ridiculous.”

According to the Australian Human Rights Commission, sexual harassment is unlawful in Australia under the Sex Discrimination Act in different areas of public life, including employment, service delivery, accommodation and education. Some types of sexual harassment may also be criminal offences.

A person who sexually harasses is primarily responsible for the sexual harassment under the Sex Discrimination Act.

A working environment or workplace culture that is sexually permeated or hostile will also amount to unlawful sexual harassment, and in many cases, employers and others can be held responsible under the Sex Discrimination Act for acts of sexual harassment done by their employers or agents.

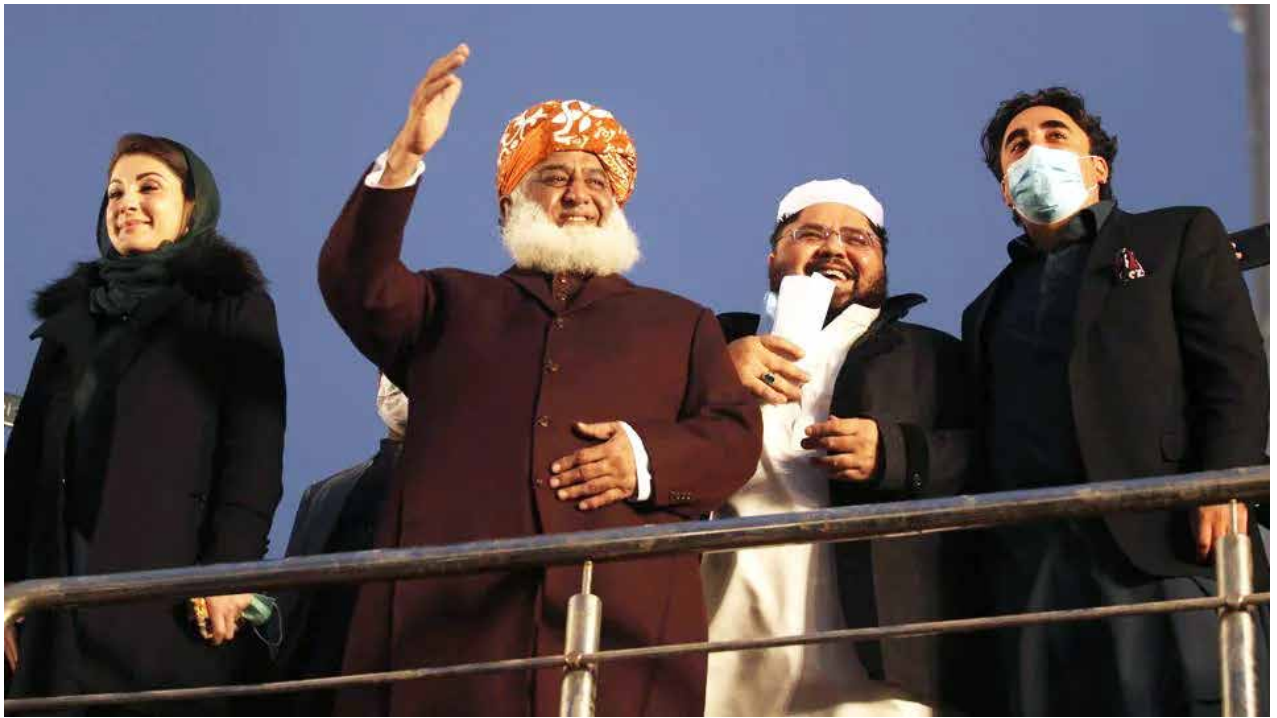
Employers may limit their liability if they can show that they took all reasonable steps to prevent the sexual harassment occurring. That, among others, is the job at the hands of the Morrison government right now.

Reasonable steps in this connection may include policies and procedures designed to create a harassment-free environment, including procedures to deal with allegations of discrimination made by employees or customers. To be effective, such policies must be well implemented, including through the provision of ongoing training, communication and reinforcement.



# The Oppositions' Dreams for Spring

*Is the opposition's March deadline for long march on Islamabad in earnest or just another keepalive?*



By Sarfraz Raja

**M**arch has now become one of the most popular and repeatedly used political term in Pakistan. Million march, long march are the terms we hear time and again, and then there was the famous independence march led by Imran Khan that the whole country witnessed.

The month of March, which is the month of Pakistan day has also become politically one of most active months. One of the reasons is senate elections on half of the seats held after every three years in March followed by elections of chairman and deputy chairman senate in same month.

Now the eight-party opposition alliance Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has again made this month center of all sights by announcing their much talked about long March will be staged that month.

## Background

Soon after its formation in September 2020, PDM announced plan of long march on Islamabad after their countrywide protests and rallies but

gave no specific date. This could not materialise because of their internal differences specifically on resignations from assemblies and consequently Pakistan People's Party and Awami National party left the coalition.

Although long march always remained on PDM's agenda, no specific date was finalised and now in a meeting of party heads in the first week of December, finally a date has been set and it is 23 March 2022 – three and a half months into the future.

Another name being thrown around for this march is mehngai march – to focus upon the major public issue of drastically increasing inflation to gain the people's sympathies, support, and participation.

## Significance of the day

The nation celebrates 23 March as Pakistan Day remembering passage of resolution of Pakistan same day in 1940 and a traditional parade of armed forces in Islamabad is also an important feature of this day and now PDM has announced their Islamabad March

on the same day.

March 2021 was the most successful months for PDM as opposition alliance got its biggest victory when PDM candidate Yusuf Raza Gillani was elected to the Senate from the Islamabad seat, beating the then finance minister Abdul Hafeez Sheikh although the ruling alliance had a majority in the National Assembly. However, that month also saw PPP and ANP exit the alliance.

Now PDM leaders have selected March again for their ultimate mehngai march adventure.

Replying criticism from government ranks about choosing 23rd March .opposition representatives say it's a national day and they would also be on road for nation and for a national cause.

They also cite the example of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf's independence march, started on 14 August 2014, the Independence Day, and followed by the famous 126-day sit-in in Islamabad, arguing PTI cannot question the choice of a national day for their protest.





## Why give a date many months later?

Inflation is an urgent issue and as such, questions have been raised over the PDM decision to hold the march with a delay of three and half months. But in background discussions, PDM leaders brush off this criticism, saying they need the extended period to build pressure on the government.

On the other hand, some political analysts believe that opposition parties PMLN and JUI have back door contacts with establishment and need the time to negotiate their terms using pressure of public protest.

However, the most plausible reason for the March date for mehngai march is weather. Islamabad's nippy winter has set in and will continue to reign until the end of February. March is when spring arrives in these parts, making outdoor night temperatures bearable for marchers.

## Will there be a sit in?

It seems PDM is inclined to let the question hang for now. In the official announcement, the alliance said the decision would be taken at the end of the march.

However, insiders say the chances of a sit-in being held are minute, especially with the month of Ramzan set to start in the first week of April, which would present practical difficulties to holding a sit in.

## Resignation or no resignations?

The question of resignations from the assemblies was the issue that broke the alliance as Pakistan Peoples Party was opposed to the idea while Maulana Fazal-ur-Rehman was set on it.

PMLN had a divided opinion with some of its members were worried what would happen if the government just decided to hold by polls to the seats vacated by them. They wanted to know how their leadership could ensure there would be no by elections.

The matter remained unresolved at the last heads meeting. PDM chief Molana Fazal ur Rehman still insisting on resignations but PMLN is now of the view that there would be just a years' time left in elections after March 2022.

This is the time when the focus on politics moves from the parliament to the constituencies, and resigning this close to general elections would not be a good idea.

PML-N also holds the leadership of opposition in the national assembly. Constitutionally, the prime minister is obliged to consult the leader of opposition when appointing the caretaker head of government to hold the general election. If PML-N resigns now, it stand to lose that privilege.

All things considered, resignations from assemblies may not be on cards.

## Government worries

When we hear to government spokespersons they seem relaxed as they believe more than a three months is a long time to go and they still believe opposition parties will take an escape route.

But if the march happens on schedule, there is a point of concern which interior minister Sheikh Rasheed has raised about selection of Pakistan Day for march as on this day some important routes including express way entering Islamabad from Faizabad may be blocked. This could create a mess.

Government sources also say PDM would be allowed to hold a peaceful protest march but keeping in view their intentions.

In final analysis, even the opposition parties are not much enthusiastic about their mehngai march. It is more likely an announcement is made as a face saving after continuous criticism.

Some sources in PDM also claim that a move of no confidence against chairman senate is also on cards before protest march. If the move succeeds, the opposition could bring a similar motion against speaker National Assembly which could be a symbolic no-confidence against Prime Minister Imran Khan.

If that were to happen, there would be no need of any protest march but it all depends upon unity and consensus among all opposition parties including those not part of PDM.





# Who is Afraid of Gwadar's Grassroots Civic Movement?

*The movement, possibly part of a wider federalist-constitutionalist Baloch awakening, is good news for Pakistan.*



## Desk Report

Just as economic activity generates wealth, political activity generates political wealth. And the wealth so generated makes the nation the richer irrespective of who pockets the immediate proceeds. This is particularly true of grassroots civic movements – like the one we have seen sprout and blossom in Gwadar over the past couple of months.

## Winter-time bloom

As part of what is being called “Gwadar ko haq do movement”, thousands of people including women and children have been protesting in the emerging port city of Pakistan. The protesters are staging a sit-in around the city's Y Square. Intermittently, rallies have been taken through the city in support of the sit-in, including some by women.

This mass protest is something of a peculiarity for Balochistan where such gatherings are unheard of (apart of course from some staged by the Hazaras). Equally, it may indicate a wider political ferment in Balochistan as it comes at the quick heels of

large protests in Turbat, Zamran, Ormara, Pasni, and Piskhan.

Political activities in Balochistan have traditionally been suspected of being aligned with centripetal militant forces. Against this backdrop, Gwadar's winter-time bloom should be welcome because it ultimately reflects the peoples' commitment to Pakistan and their resolve to work with the Pakistani state.

The protestors' demands concern basic civic amenities like potable water and health and education facilities; and civil rights like freedom of movement; and economic empowerment including fishing rights and jobs for locals.

For a change, the national media is also casting the protest in a positive light. The prestigious Dawn newspaper summed up the situation perfectly in its editorial on 19 November 2021: “Gwadar port has long been portrayed as the jewel in the CPEC crown, but in the process the city has become the very embodiment of a security state.

“The authorities' priorities are geared towards securing the port and its ancillary interests; the welfare of those for whom the area is home counts for little. Far from the port being a harbinger of an economic boom, the opposite has happened.

“Existing privations have deepened; people's mobility is restricted by security forces and there is unwarranted questioning of their activities. Many say they are made to feel like strangers in their own land.

“Adding to the miseries of the large number of fishermen among the populace, the government, they complain, has issued licences to Chinese trawlers to fish in the waters off the coast. Their small boats cannot possibly compete, as a result of which their livelihoods are being squeezed.”

## Women to the rescue

In yet another peculiarity for the time and place of this movement – and a strong reflection of the depth and breadth of its popular appeal – is how active women have been in supporting it.





Thousands of Gwadar's common women accompanied by children have taken out rallies in support of the sit-in on more than one occasions.

At one point, when sudden heavy police presence near the site of the sit-in cause apprehensions the administration was preparing to use force against the protesters, women in large numbers put themselves between the protesters and the police, voicing their determination to resist any use of force.

## Civic amenities and civil rights

On 10 November, thousands again took to the streets of Gwadar to mark the International Human Rights Day and to reiterate their support for Gwadar's push for civic amenities.

Also prominent among the noise made at the rally were slogans for restoration of full civil rights to the people of Balochistan, recovery of the Baloch missing persons, and an end to the alleged practice of disappearing people by security agencies.

## A people's maulana?

The sit-in has found an unlikely leader in Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman, the general secretary of the Balochistan provincial chapter of the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party, widely regarded as a political front for the country's security establishment.

But the Maulana has said his party has nothing to do with the protest, which he insists is a people's movement above and beyond political alignments. The tone and tenor of the speeches at the sit-in confirms it not a JI show, and its participants are accordingly a diverse group.

In any case, at the sit-in, Maulana seems to have won the people's trust and devotion. Media reports have quoted locals as saying they trusted the Maulana because he was a commoner, not a chieftain.

"Only the Maulana can sleep on the road for our cause", BBC Urdu quoted a local social worker Majid Jauhar as saying. "I know if my home lacks water [supply], so will the Maulana's home."

The sit-in has garnered support from across the political spectrum. On the other hand,

some people are incredulous at what the Maulana has been allowed to get away with.

## No anti-CPEC bias

In several media outings, the Maulana has dispelled the impression the movement's opposition to the CPEC (China-Pakistan Economic Corridor). Reports to that effect are either the result of wishful thinking by Indian media outlets or the handiwork powerful vested interests against whom the movement is mounting its struggle.



## Provocation and response

On 9 December, police arrested veteran Baloch politician Mir Yousuf Masti Khan hours after he made a fiery speech at the sit-in. The authorities charged him with making a "provocative and anti-state" speech at the sit-in.

Police arrested Yousuf Masti Khan from a hotel where he was staying and later produced him before a sessions court. The court remanded him in police custody for one day.

The organisers of the sit-in claimed that police had also registered cases against Maulana Hidayat-ur-Rehman and attempted to arrest him but could not do so due to the presence of thousands of people at the sit-in.

"We are not afraid of arrests and attitude of Gwadar police", the Maulana said speaking at the sit-in according to Dawn. "Our peaceful sit-in is being pushed towards violence".

"What does it mean to arrest an 80-year-old man?" he asked, asserting Pervez Musharraf and other generals were violating the Constitution of the country, but they were not declared rebels and traitors.

The people of Gwadar responded to the arrest by taking out their most massive rally yet on 10 December, International Human Rights Day.

The arrest also drew broad flak from elsewhere in Pakistan. The Human Rights Commission of Pakistan (HRCPP) condemned the move, asserting Khan had

done nothing more than demanding of the state to give Gwadar residents their rightful civil, political and economic rights.

"To charge Mr Khan under archaic and repressive colonial laws is undemocratic", HRCPP said in a statement. "He must be released immediately and unconditionally, especially given his poor health condition."

## Conclusion

It can be safely said that the movement is federalist in character and focused on the restoration of the people's constitutional rights. It threatens absolutely no one except those the Maulana calls "trawler mafia" and "border mafia".

The government cannot do better than to embrace the movement and make it the starting point of a turnaround of Balochistan – and Pakistan – to the benefit of all concerned.

Any attempt to crush and defeat this movement will inevitably have untoward consequences and those responsible for any such action will be judged harshly by history.



# Green Line BRT: Too Little Too Late, and Not Quite Yet

*Karachiites say they cannot understand why political parties are jostling for credit over an unfinished project.*



By Hamza Qureshi

Karachi, Pakistan's most populous city and largest business hub that generates the lion's share of the revenue for the national exchequer, finally has a mass transit system up and running.

The Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan inaugurated the Phase-1 of Green Line Bus Project on 10 December 2021 in country's largest metropolis, Karachi. The 21-km long BRT project has cost the exchequer PKR 26 billion.

But the residents of this megacity are less than pleased over the development because, among other things, the project is not quite finished yet.

## The route

The first phase of Green Line BRT starts from the Surjani Stop in the densely populated North Karachi area. There are 21 bus stations. 11.5 km of the project is elevated. The last stop of Phase-1 is at Numaish.

The route of the Green Line project begins from Surjani Town and goes through UP Turn to 4K Chowrangi, from where it passes through Nagan Chowrangi to enter North Nazimabad and Nazimabad, before reaching Gulbahar Sanitary Market. From here, the route passes through Lasbela to enter the Gurumandir area.

It passes through the underpass constructed in front of Mazar-e-Quaid to reach the Numaish intersection, the last stop of Phase I of the project. An underpass has been constructed next to the Quaid's Mausoleum to maintain sanctity of the Mazar.

## The facilities

Canteens, restrooms, and ticket booths are planned at all bus stops. Lifts and wheelchair ramps have also been constructed for the elderly and the specially-abled.

An estimated 135,000 people will be able to travel in 80 modern buses, recently import-

ed from China. The fully air-conditioned buses contain drivers' cockpit with a further sitting capacity of 44 persons. Altogether 150 persons can travel during rush hours in 18-metre long bus.

Wi-Fi and Charging ports will also be provided to passengers. Dedicated space for Specially-abled persons has also been reserved in buses. Passengers will also be able to enjoy the entertainment screen during the journey. Every bus has three hydraulic doors on each side and eighteen spots designated placing advertisements.

Each bus is equipped with five surveillance cameras connected to a central control room via internet during the journey. Restrooms have been set up for drivers at Surjani Town station.

Speaking at the inauguration ceremony, Prime Minister Imran Khan said Karachi is the economic hub of Pakistan but unfortunately no previous government thought of





Karachi. A modern transport system is essential for the prosperity of Karachi and the Green Line is the first step in this direction, he said.

Previously, the incumbent PTI government gave several deadlines. In August, Asad Umar had said that the Green Line service in Karachi will become operational by October this year. It is now confirmed that the Green Line Project will open for commercial operations as of 25 December 2021.

A day before Prime Minister was planned to officially inaugurate the project, Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) tried to stage a symbolic inauguration but were prevented from doing so. In the process, a scuffle broke out between Rangers' personnel and PML-N workers, doing which PMLN leader Ahsan Iqbal and others sustained minor injuries.

Ahsan Iqbal said the activity had been planned to honour the legacy of his party because the project had been initiated by former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif.

## Phase I

The foundation stone of the Green Line BRT Project was laid by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in February 2016 and its first phase was to be completed in 2017 at a cost of PKR 16.8 billion.

Originally designed to end at Numaish Chowrangi, the project was extended to Jama Cloth Market and Tower at the request of Sindh government. Subsequently, Blue Line Project (Memar Mor to Tower) was suspended.

Karachiites witnessed a fine start at working of the project. By the time the PML-N government completed its tenure in May 2018, work from Surjani Town to Gurumandir was almost complete.

But the pace of work on the project slowed down subsequently and its price tag has rose to PKR 26 billion. Now, a project that was due for completion in 2017 has been inaugurated in 2021 while still incomplete.

## Phase II

The Phase-2 of Green Line Project extends to main commercial hub of country. The Numaish Chowrangi is just an intersection

with no major commercial activity nearby. Extending the project means linking it with Empress Market Saddar; Regal, the largest electronics market in country, Urdu Bazaar, and Paper Market.

Other key neighbourhoods due to be linked as part of phase II are Plaza, the largest spare parts' market in Pakistan; Jama Cloth market, the oldest wholesale market of clothes; Bolton Market, the largest wholesale market in country.

The final stop of the extended BRT will be the Merewether Tower at I. I. Chundigar Road, the financial hub of Pakistan. The 2.2 km stretch of I. I. Chundigar is home to Pakistan Stock Exchange, headquarters of all the country's major banks, and several media houses.



## Current status

As of now, Phase II of the project is still on the drawing board and its financial closure has not been achieved. There are several issues to be dealt with before its commencement.

What is more, even the phase 1 has not been completed properly as of now. Ticketing System is yet to be put in place. Some ticket booths are still being constructed. Canteens and tuck shops are not functional, and no shop has been allotted to operators.

## People's response

On the face of it, Green Line BRT looks like a good step that would have positive albeit

small impact on Karachi's commuter problems. In the absence of any mass transit system, the city's population depends on qinqi rickshaw and dilapidated minibuses for their daily commutes. Cheap motorbikes assembled with Chinese parts have further exacerbated the traffic snarl-ups.

However, many among the people of Karachi believe it is a case of too little too late. Green Line is estimated to facilitate a mere 135,000 out of the 30 million population of Karachi.

Ali, a resident of Shah Faisal Colony, a residential town located next to Karachi's iconic Shahr-e Faisal, told The Truth International (TTI) Pakistan's largest metropolis needed a managed mass transit system on emergency grounds.

Another Karachiite, Ahmed Abdullah wondered why Karachi's first BRT project was taking so long to complete. A teacher by profession, he noted that the 27-km-long Lahore Metro had been completed in just 11 months and Islamabad Metro had taken a mere 13 months to go operational.

"What has Karachi been so wronged?" he was askance. "If any city deserved to have the first mass transit project in Pakistan, it was Karachi. But look at the city. And then you have PPP, PMLN, MQMP, and PTI all jostling to take credit of an incomplete project!"

People in Karachi have a general perception that the governments in Islamabad think of the metropolis as a mere cash cow. They are interested in the revenue generated by the country's business hub, but pay no thought to its development.

# Pakistan Finally Finds the Political Will to Fight Money Laundering

*To the infinite annoyance of the entrenched elites, authorities are embarking on a tough enforcement drive.*

By Azeem Waqas

It seems the businesspeople and politicians are alike up in arms against a tough campaign the Federal Board of Revenue (FBR) is mounting to stamp out money laundering and tax evasion.

However, in an unmistakable sign the government means business this time, the FBR appears to be pressing ahead with the drive, brushing aside all the grumbling and complaining.

Pakistan has been under pressure from the IMF's Financial Action Task Force (FATF) to plug the legislative and enforcement loopholes to tighten the screws on money laundering and financing of terrorism.

Ostensibly, the legal framework for the task has been in place for about a decade now, but the enforcement part had left a lot to be desired – which is why Pakistan remains on the so-called grey list of FATF.

This time around, FBR action appears to be comprehensive and decisive. The regulator has issued notices of money laundering to real estate agents, builders, land developers, jewellers and hundreds of businessmen asking them to explain source of income under AMLA 2020.

Chairman National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue, Faizullah Kamoka is furious that businesspeople are receiving notices of money laundering without even being assessed and inquired by the FBR.

Businessmen in Faisalabad are complaining against the notices and demanding tax evasion to be separated from money laundering.

During the last three years, the Customs Intelligence wing of the FBR has initiated 170 inquiries of money laundering and against 44 cases prosecution is underway, but it had failed to secure any conviction up until now.

That changed 30 November 2021 when a case resulted in the conviction of the accused under Section 4 of AMLA 2010.

Elaborating on the difficulty of prosecuting money laundering cases, DG Customs Intelligence says proving tax evasion as an offence of money laundering is a tedious exercise.

He, however, was optimistic to secure more conviction in the coming days as the department has sufficient evidences of money laundering in several cases.

“Trade base money laundering is one of the biggest challenge where money is whitened through layering and money is passed through a series of bank accounts”, added.

Similarly, FBR Inland Revenue and Intelligence (I&I) wing has started 215 cases of money laundering. Properties worth



PKR 235 billion have been attached during the last three years as part of these prosecutions.

The FBR has submitted another 51 cases involving 267 persons accused of money laundering and tax evasion to the tune of PKR 67 billion.

FBR's DG I&I Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur says the business community is pressing for tax evasion and money laundering to be dealt with separately.

Establishing money laundering is a complex task for FBR. Like all white-collar crimes, its investigation and prosecution requires highly sophisticated training. It consists of different stages.

Senator Saleem Mandviwalla has said that FBR and FIA are sending notices of money laundering to every other businessman. Notices of frivolous nature are forcing business to move abroad and the economy of the country is suffering.

FBR and NAB are harassing every businessperson and asking them about money laundering issues, he said, adding that the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue under him unanimously rejected bringing tax evasion regime under the AMLA Act 2010.

PMLN Senator Sadia Abbasi has also protested against the money laundering notices and revealed that NAB has sent money-laundering notice to his brother in law, based in USA for the last 30 year.

FBR receives suspicious report from Financial Management unit (FMU). STRs (suspected transaction reports) are cross-matched to establish predicate offence. Evidences are collected and opportunity of being heard is given to the accused person. Later on FBR filed a complaint in the court and properties are attached.



Chairman FBR Dr Muhammad Ashfaq Ahmad has said, “FBR’s prime responsibility is to collect revenue for the state; Parliament has given powers to probe money laundering case, which FBR is doing unwillingly.

“Although FBR could not establish money laundering cases at very large scale but AML Act 2021 has created some deterrence against the money laundering”.

On 1 December 2021, FBR announced it had won the first ever case of money laundering against a businessperson. The accused was also found guilty of massive tax evasion.

The Directorate General I & I-IR had received financial intelligence in respect of Habibullah, proprietor of M/s Rai Trading Company, Bajaur, KP wherein it was disclosed that the quantum of transactions (Cash & Bank) did not match with the suspect’s business profile.

Initial investigation by the Directorate Intelligence & Investigation, Inland Revenue Service unearthed six other bank accounts with huge transactions. Total proceeds in all the bank accounts came to PKR 2,090 Million whereas the suspect paid only tax of PKR 192,877 for the tax year 2015.

The suspect was involved in huge concealment of income, undeclared bank accounts and misdeclaration/inaccurate particulars to hoodwink the tax authorities. A detailed scrutiny also revealed element of money laundering. Therefore, investigations were initiated for the offence of money laundering under the Anti-Money Laundering Act 2010 (AMLA).

With the prior approval of the concerned court, bank accounts were provisionally attached under section 8 of the AMLA 2010. On completion of investigations under section 9 of AMLA 2010, final challan under AMLA-2010 along with the complaint under section 203 of the Income Tax Ordinance (ITO), 2001 for the offence of money laundering and tax evasion offence respectively were submitted in the Court.

The prayers of the department before the court included punishment for both tax evasion and money laundering and prayed for forfeiture of the proceeds.

The trial concluded on 30 November 2021 resulting into conviction of the accused under Section 4 of AMLA 2010. He was sentenced to two years of rigorous imprisonment and a fine of PKR 500,000.

In addition to this, the accused was also convicted under Section 192-A of the ITO, 2001 with a simple imprisonment of one year and a fine of PKR 100,000. Furthermore, the court forfeited the proceeds of crime amounting to PKR 2,090.4 Million.

FBR considers it a great success in its ongoing drive against tax evasion and money laundering and will pave the way for more convictions of various cases under investigation with the department as well as awaiting the conclusion of trial proceedings in the relevant courts of law.

In another case, on FMU’s intelligence (FBR-IR) registered a case against Mr. Sun and his associates under Income Tax Ordinance, 2001 along with Anti Money laundering Act, 2010. The suspects

were charged for committing tax theft of more than PKR 1.26 billion over the period of last 5 years.

The Customs Court issued bail-able arrest warrants for the four accused. The Customs and Taxation’s Special Court granted permission to attach ten immovable properties and ten bank accounts of four accused. Further investigation is in progress.

Counter Terrorism Wing (CTW) of FIA, initiated an investigation against Mr. Sun and his associates for their involvement in TF and ML. FIA-CTW lodged an FIR against Mr. Sun and his associates under different laws including AML Act 2010 and Anti-Terrorism Act 1997. During the course of enquiry, sufficient incriminating evidence came on record substantiating that the said individuals committed the offence of TF, using channels of Hawala and employing tactics of ML and forgery. The case is under investigation.



In a separate development, SBP conducted a thematic inspection covering multiple banks and carried out focused onsite review of the bank accounts and as a result, imposed monetary penalties on multiple banks for violation of AML/CFT (Anti-Money Laundering/Combating the Financing of Terrorism) prudential regulations.

Renowned tax expert Dr Ikram ul Haq has said that FBR is empowered to prosecute money laundering cases. All over the world tax evasion is considered as a money laundering. Due to FATF challenges tax evasion cannot be separated from money laundering and is considered as a criminal offence.

He said the government could create a national crime agency to investigate and prosecute money laundering case but until that happens, FBR has to do this job.

DG I&I Mir Muhammad Ali Talpur is hopeful that after winning case of money laundering FATF will be satisfied in the upcoming meeting.

# Is Pakistan Ready to Fly European and North American Skies Once More?

*An ICAO audit team is set to rule soon if PCAA's safety oversight systems up to scratch.*

By Hamza Qureshi

Pakistani airlines may soon be able to fly to Europe and North America once more, thanks to an array of measures taken by Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) to firm up safety oversight at the country's civil aviation facilities, The Truth International (TTI) can report.

Pakistani airlines have been barred from operating in much of the world since mid-2020 following a scandal concerning pilots' fake licenses.

The scandal surfaced in June 2020 in the wake of a statement made by Minister for Aviation Ghulam Sarwar Khan in Parliament saying 262 (or 30 percent) of the 860 pilots working in Pakistan had fake flying licenses.

Although it later transpired that the BOI report the minister had cited on the floor of parliament did not exist, the revelation was so shocking that it reverberated around the world and prompted the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) and United States' Department of Transportation to revoke permission for Pakistani airlines to fly in their respective jurisdictions.

Although the EASA had initially suspended Pakistani airlines from operating to European Union member countries for six months starting July 2020, it later extended this suspension until March 31, 2021.

Again, at the end of that period, the EASA told Pakistani authorities the International Civil Aviation Organisation (ICAO) had made public a significant safety concern for Pakistan, which was an indication of a serious degradation of PCAA certification and oversight capabilities.

The safety audit faced delays due to various reasons, including the travel restrictions caused by Covid.

Finally, ICAO's nine-member audit team arrived in Pakistan on 27 November. During the ten-day Safety Audit of CAA,



ICAO experts reviewed processes at various departments including Flight Standards, Aerodrome, and Licensing.

The team also visited Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad Airports and inspected airport services, apron area, runway, and control towers. In addition to inspecting PIA's Karachi-Islamabad flight, ICAO experts also inspected the airlines' offices and engineering facilities.

Last week, the audit team successfully completed its mission and PCAA sources say it had all the bases covered. They are optimistic the audit team's findings, expected to be announced in a few weeks, will be positive.

CAA sources say the ICAO team appreciated the overall progress made by PCAA and commended the preparation and hard work prior to the audit. They further say the audit team closely reviewed the CAA's Licensing System and some minor observations have been also raised to improve it.

CAA Deputy Director General Regulatory Nadir Shafi Dar told The Truth International (TTI) the ICAO audit team has expressed satisfaction over the overall performance of Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority.

Dar is hopeful that the PCAA Safety Audit Report will be released before the Christmas holidays. A successful audit report will surely have a positive impact on Pakistan's

aviation sector and airlines.

The PIA Spokesperson, Abdullah Hafeez Khan expressed hope that soon PIA will be resuming its flight operation to EU, UK and the US. CAA Director General Khaqan Murtaza has congratulated the successful efforts of the CAA team for the audit.

According to PCAA sources, as a result of ICAO's positive report, all restrictions on PIA and other Pakistani airlines flying to UK, Europe, and the US will be lifted and Pakistan CAA will be allowed to issue licenses to pilots.

The audit was conducted under the ICAO's Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) was established in 1999 to promote global aviation safety through regular audits of ICAO member states.

The object of the program, managed by the Monitoring and Oversight office within ICAO's Air Navigation Bureau, is to determine the member states' ability to maintain effectively their safety oversight systems.

In case of a positive audit report, the way will be paved for the lifting of the bans on PIA and other Pakistani airlines' flights to Europe and the United States will be lifted. Similarly, the ban on issuing licenses to pilots will be also lifted.



# Pakistan is Cosying Up with Russia

*New air and trade corridors between Islamabad and Moscow will usher in a new era of economic and strategic cooperation.*



By Khaleeq Ahmad

Pakistan and Russia appear to be warming up to a new phase of bilateral economic and strategic relations after more than 50 years of unease originating from the Cold War era. Over the last couple of weeks, Pakistan fielded two ministerial delegations to Russia in a move to rebuild strategic relations amid a widening gap with the United States.

First, a large delegation led by Minister for Economic Affairs Omar Ayub Khan visited Yekaterinburg, Russia from 24-26 November to co-chair Russian-Pakistani Intergovernmental Commission (IGC) on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation.

This was followed by a visit to Moscow by a 6-member delegation led by National Security Advisor (NSA) Dr Moeed Yusuf on the invitation of Secretary of the Security Council of Russia Nikolai Patrushev to review the whole gamut of bilateral relations and hold in-depth discussions on regional and international issues.

Testifying before a parliamentary panel last week, Omar Ayub Khan reported

“major breakthroughs” in the post-Cold War era.

The crux of his briefing to the Standing Committee of the National Assembly on Economic Affairs was that Russia had agreed to have direct flights from Pakistan, allow its air-corridor with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and open direct banking links and address customs barriers besides.

Perhaps most significantly, Moscow agreed to enhance for Pakistan the scope of scholarships for technical and scientific education in disciplines the doors to which have been closed on Pakistan in the Western world.

Mr Khan said physical work on two major projects from CARs – Central Asia-South Asia Power Transmission Line (CASA-1300) and Turkmenistan-Pakistan Gas Pipeline – had come to a halt due to the recent Afghan situation. That is where NSA Moeed Yusuf and Nikolai Patrushev focused their discussions.

As expected, nothing substantial is in the public domain except that two “discussed the situation in Afghanistan

at length and resolved to support all efforts to bring lasting peace in Afghanistan”.

An official statement said the two dignitaries “expressed grave concern over the looming humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and urged the need for practical steps by the international community to avert the impending situation. The two sides expressed satisfaction over the trajectory of their bilateral relations and agreed to remain engaged on all matters of mutual importance”.

According to the detailed brief of his visit shared by Mr Omar Ayub with the NA panel, this was the first time that the two sides had signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) for banking communications. It was now up to the central banks of the two sides to iron out arrangements for banks and financial institutions to help businesses settle financial transactions.

He explained that Pakistan was following western banking arrangements like IBAN (international bank account numbers) and Swift Codes which was not acceptable to Russia that used its

own system of SPFS (System for Transfer of Financial Messages) of the Central Bank of Russia.

Pakistan's embracing this system would be a major development because as of now, the banks in two countries cannot communicate.

Mr Khan said the two sides had also committed to meet every month until they signed a shareholding agreement by 15 February 2022 to achieve major milestones for the Russian and Pakistani nominated entities on the USD 2.0-2.5 billion worth of PakStream Gas Pipeline project.

The Russian government has set up a totally private sector special purpose vehicle – PakStream LLC – to implement the project from Karachi to Lahore. With 90 percent investment to come from Russia, Pakistan's state-run ISGS would be part of the project that would move towards physical implementation after the shareholding agreement is signed in February.

Minister Khan said the two sides had also finalised draft minutes of the meetings under which the air-corridor between the two nations would be opened.

This is another breakthrough. Presently, it takes almost 21 hours to reach Russia and adjoining CARs Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. The direct air corridor will cut air travel time between Islamabad and Moscow down to four hours and provide direct access with CARs as well.

Pakistan and Russia had started off economic strategic cooperation back in the day with two major initiatives. In 1961, Pakistan set up its largest exploration and production firm, the Oil and Gas Development Company Ltd (OGDCL), with the Soviet (then Union of Soviet Socialist Republics - USSR) technical expertise along with a long term financial support of 27 million roubles to finance equipment and services of exports for exploration.

This was followed by another strategic engagement for establishment of Pakistan's largest industrial complex. In January 1969, Pakistan took services of Tiajproexport of USSR for feasibility study and then techno-financial assistance in January 1971 for construction of Pakistan Steel Mills under the supervision of Soviet experts.

However, despite such a robust beginning, bilateral cooperation remained almost non-existent over the following five decades except for a few private sector business ventures due to diplomatic tensions associated with Cold War politics.

Omar Ayub also reported bilateral discussions on modernisation of Pakistan Railways network and rolling stock with the Russian assistance and investment including supply of rolling stock and equipment.

Russian newswire Tass reported that the Pakistan delegation visited the Ural Locomotives Plant as part of its government's interest in the modernisation of rolling stock and equipment for railways, including the use of Russian equipment.

On the occasion, President of the Sinara Group Dmitry Pumpyansky hoped for business cooperation with Pakistan, including in the supply of electric trains. Ural Locomotives (Verkhnyaya Pyshma, Sverdlovsk Region) specialises in the design, production, and maintenance of new-generation rolling stock.

The minister said Russia, whose technological advancement matched international standards, had agreed to enhance scholarships and admissions to Pakistani students of various disciplines of higher learning in which the West was not allowing Pakistani students.

Some of the areas identified for this kind of cooperation are artificial intelligence, robotics, advanced computing, nanotechnology, advanced mathematics, cryptography, and cyber security.

Overall, the panel was informed that after the cold war regime, the Russians had now shown unprecedented interest in making investments in Pakistan to lay PakStream Pipeline, establishing banking channels to enhance mutual trade, starting direct flights between Russia-Pakistan and increasing scholarship quota for Pakistani students in higher technical courses.

He said a major difficulty for Pakistani business to enter Eurasian Region was that Pakistan did not recognise Armenia. As a result, Islamabad has to negotiate custom tariffs and bilateral arrangements individually with each member of the Eurasian Economic Union which was a time consuming process.

Officials said Russia was also ready to allow import of grains, particularly rice from Pakistan on the basis of technical information and guarantee provided by the Pakistan government.

At the end of the IGC, the two sides appreciated that even though bilateral trade had increased by more than 45 percent to USD 790 million when compared to 2019, it was not commensurate with the potential that exists.

Therefore, the two sides agreed to continue joint work aimed at signing agreement regarding Cooperation and Mutual Assistance in Customs Matters; Protocol between two sides on administrative cooperation, information exchange and mutual assistance under the unified system of tariff preferences of the Eurasian Economic Union.

An official statement said the Russian side confirmed its interest to supply and provide after-sales service of Russian civil aircrafts to Pakistan and commercial organisations subject to compliance with ICAO standards and PCAA rules and regulations.

The two sides also agreed to develop cooperation in the field of pharmaceuticals. Pakistan also encouraged Russian firms to bid for LNG supplies and storage facilities in Pakistan.

Both "agreed to finalise the draft agreement between the two countries on International Road Transport", said a statement adding the Federal Air Transport Agency (FATA) of Russia together with the Civil Aviation Authority of Pakistan (PCAA), "will continue finalising the draft Working Arrangement on Airworthiness with aim of signing it as soon as possible.

The Ural Chamber of Commerce and Industry (Russia) and the Federation of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry (Pakistan) signed an MOU for creating economic and trade cooperation opportunities between the two countries.

A statement put out by the Pakistani embassy in Russia noted the current intergovernmental negotiations on building the New Trade Corridor through Pakistan-Central Asia-Russia was a clear sign of the new page in the strategic partnership between Russia and Islamabad.



# Making Sense of Pakistan's IMF Lifeline

*The good, the bad, and the ugly of the IMF EFF program Pakistan took pains put back on track.*



By Javed Mahmood

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is expected to resume disbursement of the suspended USD 6 billion package for Pakistan in the month of January 2022. The resumption of the stalled IMF programme has become a talk of the town in the country because of the tough IMF conditions.

The PTI government claims that the bailout package is essential to strengthen the foreign exchange reserves and the value of rupee, and to meet repayment on external debt in 2022.

The government's detractors and the masses believe that the IMF programme has already unleashed a rein of price-hike in the country through implementation of some of the upfront measures and the programme would further trigger inflation.

This tidal wave of inflation, the argument goes, will result from further increases in power and gas tariffs, elimination of subsidies, revenue generation measures to raise an additional PKR 300 billion in FY2021-22, and steady increase in petroleum levy by at least four rupees per

litre every month until it reaches 30 rupees/litre level.

Moreover, some economists are of the opinion that the IMF programme would only be a short-term relief for the economy of Pakistan while in the long-term, it would create more troubles for consumers, business community, and taxpayers in the country.

In this article, we discuss the pros and cons of the IMF programme for Pakistan in 2022 and beyond it.

Before resuming the stalled programme, IMF has given a task to the PTI government to accomplish some of the upfront measures – called prior actions in the IMF jargon. The most contentious of these is further amendment of the State Bank of Pakistan law to guarantee complete autonomy to the central bank.

Another prior action agreed by Pakistan is the complete elimination of subsidies. This will involve rationalization of the general sales tax slabs and phased-increase in petroleum levy, electricity and gas tariffs through mini-budget before 12th January.

## The government's position

Officials say the resumption of the IMF's suspended programme was essential to support the balance of payment position, to maintain stability of rupee-dollar parity, and to gain access to the international money markets.

The government expects an estimated USD 7 billion in financing over the first couple of months following the resumption of the IMF program. This includes the USD 3 billion cash loan from Saudi Arabia already deposited with the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP).

This Saudi loan carries four percent mark-up although the tenure of this cash loan has not been shared with the public.

In addition to USD 1 billion IMF loan, expected to be handed over to Pakistan in January 2022, the PTI government expects the disbursement of about USD 3 billion in loans from the World Bank, ADB, and other multi-lateral lenders.

Also, the government's leaders believe that the country will be able to attract much-awaited foreign investment.

Dollar-rupee exchange rate is another area of concern for everyone in Pakistan and the Prime Minister and others in the government claim the depletion of the country's forex reserves because of the yawning current account deficit is the reason for the downslide of the rupee against the US dollar and other major currencies.

## The twin deficits

Over the first four months (July-Oct 2021) of the ongoing fiscal year, Pakistan's current account deficit increased four-fold, tallying at USD 5.18 billion compared with USD 1.21 billion over the corresponding period last fiscal, according to SBP data.

The trade deficit almost doubled, weighing in at USD 15 billion over the same period, compared with USD 7.56 billion over the corresponding period last fiscal.

In terms of exports, the country closely missed the target set for the first four months of this financial year as exports for this period totalled to USD 9.49 billion against the target of USD 9.6 billion. However, this reflected a 25 percent growth from USD 7.57 billion recorded over the corresponding period last year.

Pakistan's exports in October 2021 grew by 17.5 percent to USD 2.471 billion – the highest ever recorded in any October.

On the flip side, imports expanded by a staggering 64 percent during Jul-Oct 2021, soaring to USD 25 billion as against to USD 15.2 billion during Jul-Oct 2020. This represents a surge of USD 10 billion.

More than 40 percent of this increase was investment-driven (capital goods, raw material, and intermediates), indicating enhanced industrial activity and expansion ahead.

## Rupee-dollar parity

On 9 December 2022, the dollar-rupee exchange rate in the inter-bank operations against surpassed 178 rupees level while in open market the dollar-rupee parity hit 180 rupees. Thus, the value of dollar is staying close to 180 rupees in the inter-bank and open market operations.

Current account deficit and trade deficit are being termed the two major factors driving up the value of dollar and other leading currencies. When the PTI formed its government in August 2018, at that time the dollar-rupee value was fluctuating around 118 to 119 rupees.

Thus, in little over three years' rule of the PTI government, dollar has edged up by around 60 rupees, causing a serious blow to the Pakistani currency, consumers, imports and cost of doing business at international level and in domestic markets.

alarming increase in the trade and current account deficits, unabated decline in value of Pakistani rupee and recent hike in the SBP's discount rate to 8.75 percent.

Some market analysts, economists, and politicians termed this massive decline in the stock market in a single day as a vote of no-confidence by investors against the economic policies of the PTI government.

## The accord with IMF

In November 2021, IMF announced had reached a staff-level agreement with



## The PSX bloodbath

On 2 December 2021, the Pakistan Stock Exchange (PSX) crashed with a massive single-day dip of 2,005 points in the benchmark index. On that day the stock market opened trading at 45,369 points, but within hours the index started bleeding with rapid erosion of share value and unprecedented selling pressure.

The PSX closed the day with a net loss of over 2,135 points which shocked everyone in the country and abroad.

The reasons which the market's pundits cited behind this nosedive is that the market players found an opportunity to express their concern against a consistent and an

Pakistan on policies and reforms essential to complete the sixth review under the EFF.

The agreement is subject to approval by the IMF Executive Board, following the implementation of prior actions by Pakistan, pertaining to fiscal and institutional reforms. The completion of the review would lead to the disbursement of 750 million SDRs (Special Drawing Rights) – or USD 1.059 billion.

With the release of this tranche, the total disbursement under the EFF will come to USD 3.027 billion. In April 2020, the IMF had provided USD 1.386 billion to help Pakistan overcome the economic impact of the COVID-19 shock.



# Consumers Languish as Huge Power Surplus Goes Down the Drain

*While Pakistan pays through the nose for surplus power capacity, nearly half a million applications for electricity connections are pending.*

**By Ashraf Malkham**

ISLAMABAD: As many as 485,000 applications for new electricity connections are languishing with distribution companies (DISCOs) although Pakistan runs a power surplus to the tune of 15,000 megawatt per month on average, The News International has learnt on good authority.

In other words, the country pays PKR 400-500 billion a year to power generation companies (GENCOs) as capacity charges, while nearly half a million consumers remain without access to power supply – all thanks to the ineptitude or callousness of those entrusted with the affairs of the power sector.

According to official figures available from the Ministry of Energy, Pakistan has a surplus of 10,000 megawatts of electricity on average during the peak demand summer months, which doubles in winter as electricity demand eases.

Electricity is an important driver of economic and social development. Access to electricity is itself a metric of living standard. What is more, granting all those consumers access to energy would result in precious revenues for a sector strapped with crippling circular debt because of paucity of revenues.

If we take a closer look at application pendency, MEPCO (Multan Electric Power Company) tops the list with 218,012, LESCO (Lahore Electricity Supply Company) comes second with 107,866, and PESCO (Peshawar Electricity Supply Company) is at number three with 4, 664 applications pending.

The other DISCOs are IESCO with 44,225, GEPCO with 51,030, FESCO with 54,278, HESCO with 3,069, SEPCO with 524, and QESCO with 470, and K Electric with 17,705 applications pending as of 30 June 2021

Last year, Power Division submitted a plan before the federal cabinet to eliminate circular debt by December 2020, but it fared no differently from past efforts as circular debt continued to balloon at an ever higher rate as compared to previous years.

A senior official in the Ministry of Energy told this correspondent on condition of anonymity that the power sector was bearing the brunt of a series of misaligned and reactive policies, which is why it remained mired in problems despite several upward revisions of consumer tariff over the last three years.

The last three years saw power tariffs rise by almost 45 percent, but the sector still piled up more than PKR 2.3 trillion in circular debt, which is still on the rise notwithstanding the government's tall claims to eliminate it.

A year-wise study of increases in circular debt over the last five years reveals that although the increase during the current year



dipped somewhat from last year's level, it is still higher than the increase recorded in 2016-17. Circular debt stock rose to PKR 818 billion in 2016-17, PKR 1127 billion in 2017-18, PKR 1618 billion in 2018-19, PKR 2151 billion in 2019-20, and PKR 2280 billion in 2020-21.

Further analysis shows that payables due to IPPs and GENECOs stood at PKR 379 billion in 2016-17, PKR 544 billion in 2017-18, PKR 812 billion in 2018-19, PKR 1147 in 2019-2020, and PKR 1350 billion in 2020-21. Circular debt payable to GENCOs by Power Holding Company through commercial bank loans stood at PKR 818 in 2016-17, and rose to PKR 930 billion in 2020-21 .

An official serving with the Central Power Purchase Agency told this correspondent that revised contracts with a significant number of IPPs will help in revamping the sector. However, circular debt would continue to rise unless the sector's governance issues are addressed.

The sector has struggled for years to deal with systemic inefficiencies and leakages like line losses and theft. Its woes will only be compounded with the addition of more than 12,000 megawatts to installed capacity as more power generation projects in the pipeline come online by 2028.

Economists agree the accumulation of electricity circular debt can rightly be termed as one of the country's foremost macroeconomic challenges, especially because – as it well known – the electricity tariffs in Pakistan are the highest in the region.

Thus, a plethora of systemic and organizational issues have conspired together to make the country's energy sector – which would normally be expected to fuel growth – a constant drain on the exchequer and a drag on economic development.

# Decoding the EIU's Worldwide Cost of Living (WCOL) Index

*The index measures cost to international buyers in dollar terms, without taking into account the locals' purchasing power.*

By Ayesha Javaid

In a tell-tale sign of the respective nations' rising and falling fortunes, a prestigious global cost of living index has rated Israel's Tel Aviv as the world's most expensive city, and Syria's Damascus as the cheapest.

If you are wondering how a war-torn city could be cheap compared with a stable city, take a good look at the methodology of the EIU's Worldwide Cost of Living (WCOL) index. You will find that it measures the cost of living in US dollar terms.

Given that a weak currency remains the single most important indicator of a beleaguered economy, it will by definition rate Syria's Damascus (ranked 173) and Libya's Tripoli (ranked 172) as cheap, with the currencies of those two nations teetering on the brink of total collapse.

A US dollar could buy about 512 Syrian pounds in December 2021. This December, it buys about 2,512, meaning the Syrian currency has diminished to about four percent of its value a year ago. The trajectory of the Libyan dinar has been similar.

The Israeli New Shekel, in contrast, barely moved over this period from 3.16 to a dollar to 3.27. EIU expressly states Israel's soaring currency as one of the reasons for the city climbing from the fifth place to the first this year.

Tehran has been the biggest climber on the index, up a staggering 50 places to 29th, owing to continued supply-side constraints, goods shortages and rising import prices following the re-imposition of US sanctions.

EIU describes why Damascus has retained its place as the world's cheapest city: "Damascus has easily retained its place as the cheapest city in the world to live in. It was ranked the lowest in seven of the ten pricing categories, and was among the lowest in the remaining three.

"While prices elsewhere have generally firmed up, in Damascus they have fallen as Syria's war-torn economy has struggled. Tripoli, which also faces political and economic challenges, is ranked second from the bottom in our rankings, and is particularly cheap for food, clothing and transport."

Small wonder the cities rated cheapest on the index "are mainly in the Middle East and Africa, or in the poorer parts of Asia."

The Pakistani rupee slid from PKR 110 to a US dollar in December 2017 to PKR 160 in December 2020, shedding approximately 45 percent of its value. Between December 2020 and 2021, it again fell from PKR 160 to PKR 176 to a US dollar, shaving a further ten percent off its diminished value.

Karachi, the only Pakistani city to feature on the index, is ranked 176, in the company of Damascus and Tripoli among the world's cheapest ten cities.



Economic challenges, however, are not the sole determinant of low index score, as EIU explains. "Most US cities have fallen in the rankings compared with last year, after the government responded to the covid-19 pandemic by injecting more money into the economy.

A twice-yearly survey conducted by EIU (Economist Intelligence Unit), WCOL compares more than 400 individual prices across over 200 products and services in 173 cities. Data for the survey, which has been carried out for more than 30 years, are collected each March and September, and compiled into an index for publication in June and December.

The EIU says, "The survey has been designed to enable human resources and finance managers to calculate cost-of-living allowances and build compensation packages for expatriates and business travellers."

On average, across the cities for which EIU have comparable data (and excluding four cities that suffer from hyperinflation or very high inflation, namely Caracas, Damascus, Buenos Aires and Tehran), prices for goods and services covered by WCOL have risen by 3.5 percent year-on-year in local currency terms.

While this is a marked acceleration from 1.9 percent increase seen during the same period last year, it is dwarfed by Pakistan's 2021 inflation reported at 8.9 percent.

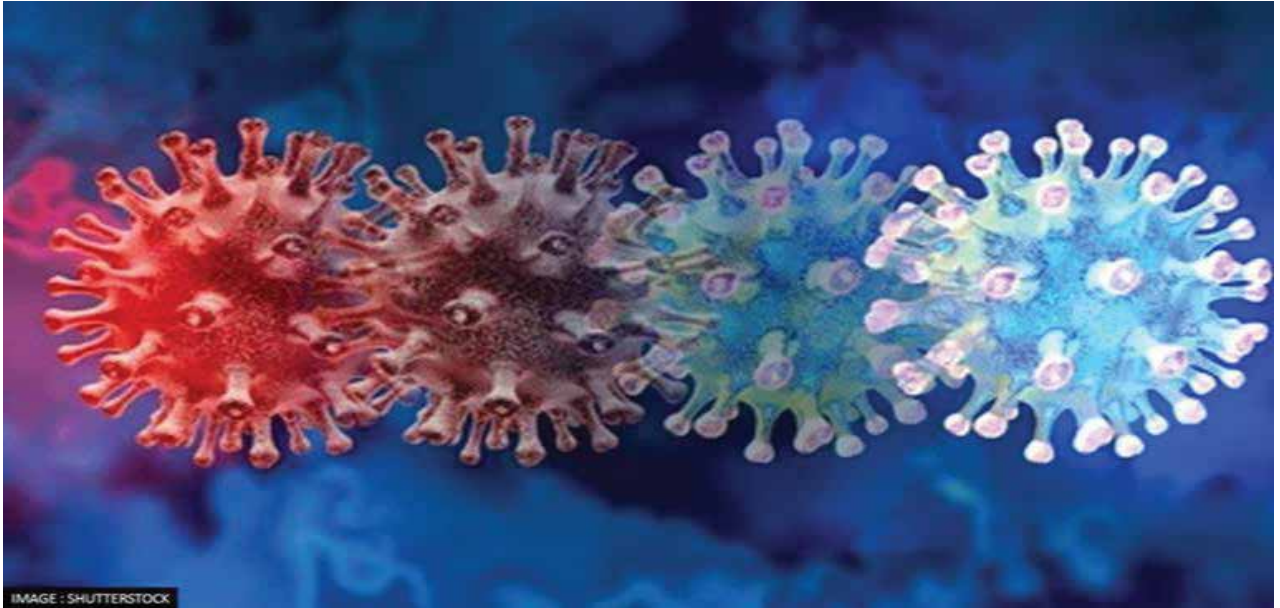
EIU says transport has seen the biggest price increases of the ten categories in the index, with index scores rising by an average of 3.8 points. "The average cost of a litre of unleaded petrol (the key component of this category) has soared by 21%, although prices for public transport have stayed more stable."

The WCOL ranking now covers more than 200 goods and services in 173 major cities (we have added 40 cities since our previous survey). The newcomers include seven cities in the US and 11 in China.



# The Omicron Threat

*Authorities are on their toes assessing the threat from the new Covid-19 variant and chalking up strategies to deal with it.*



By Noor Aftab

Amid fears of another global surge of the coronavirus the Pakistani authorities are scrambling to gather international data on potentially more deadly and infectious Omicron variant, its capabilities and perhaps most important, how effectively the current vaccines will protect against it.

The discovery of the strain sent a chill through much of the world as nations raced to halt air travel, markets fell sharply and scientists held emergency meetings to weigh the exact risks, which were largely unknown. The alarm bells started ringing in Pakistan when the passengers who arrived at Karachi Airport from South Africa showed some symptoms of Omicron virus.

According to the global health experts, Omicron has about 50 mutations, including more than 30 in the spike, a viral protein on its surface that the vaccines train the body to recognize and attack.

Given the past mistakes committed during research soon after emergence of the coronavirus disease, the researchers now everywhere want to avoid drawing conclusions prematurely. Preliminary tests of the coronavirus took only one known mutation into account and

underestimated its ability to evade the immune system.

Out of total 50, Omicron also has 26 unique spike mutations, compared with 10 in Delta and six in Beta. Many of them seem likely to render the variant more difficult for the immune system to recognize and thwart.

The reports suggested that early findings are a mixed picture. The variant may be more transmissible and better able to evade the body's immune responses, both to vaccination and to natural infection, than prior versions of the virus.

The World Health Organization (WHO) on 26 November designated the variant B.1.1.529 a 'variant of concern', named Omicron, on the advice of WHO's Technical Advisory Group on Virus Evolution (TAG-VE). This decision was based on the evidence presented to the TAG-VE that Omicron has several mutations that may have an impact on how it behaves, for example, on how easily it spreads or the severity of illness it causes.

The biggest question is whether protection from Covid-19 vaccines – nearly 8 billion doses have been administered globally – will hold up. And, will

people previously infected with the coronavirus be immune from infection with Omicron?

The WHO has made it clear that the widely used PCR tests continue to detect infection, including infection with Omicron, as seen with other variants as well. The studies are ongoing to determine whether there is any impact on other types of tests, including rapid antigen detection tests.

WHO chief scientist Soumya Swaminathan urged people not to panic over the emergence of the Omicron coronavirus variant and said it was too early to say if Covid-19 vaccines would have to be modified to fight it.

Francesco Rocca, the president of the International Federation of Red Cross, has said, "The scientific community has warned the international community on several occasions about the risks of very new variants in places where there is a very low rate of vaccinations."

The Pakistani health authorities are still waiting for the results of the research being carried out at the international level because they want to know whether existing vaccines can ward off severe illness and death and if booster doses are needed to protect the people.

Still, the makers of the two most effective vaccines, Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna, are preparing to reformulate their shots if necessary. If the vaccines prove to be much less potent against Omicron, they may need to be tweaked to enhance their effectiveness. They are also planning to test an artificial version of Omicron against their vaccines.

The latest data revealed that the patients who recovered from Covid-19 and then received even one dose of a vaccine tend to produce a broader range of antibodies, capable of recognizing more versions of the virus, than do people who are only vaccinated.

Even as scientists began vigorous scrutiny of the new variant, countries around the world curtailed travel to and from nations in southern Africa, where Omicron was first identified. Despite the restrictions, the virus has already found its way to a half-dozen European countries, including the United Kingdom, as well as Australia, Israel and Hong Kong.

In a departure from the past, the authorities all over the world reacted more quickly to Omicron. Scientists started examining samples from 100 infected patients within just 36 hours from the first signs of trouble in South Africa. Then they alerted the international world about the dangers associated with the Omicron variant.

The data collected from various reports showed that the scientists in South Africa also rushed to test coronavirus vaccines against the new variant within an hour of the first alarm. Now, dozens of teams worldwide including researchers at Pfizer-BioNTech and Moderna have joined the chase.

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) has announced that on-the-spot vaccination would be carried out at public places to mitigate the negative impacts of the coronavirus disease. Healthcare workers and people above 50 years of age would be given booster shots.

The free of cost booster shot can be administered six months after the last dose of vaccine.

Federal Minister Asad Umer who heads the NCOC says the authorities have adopted a

'zero tolerance' policy and booster shots would be given to immunocompromised people, healthcare workers and those aged over 50 years.

The NCOC has discussed the epidemic data, national vaccine strategy and disease prevalence across the country.

The NCOC has also added more names to its Category C list of countries from where travelers are banned from entering Pakistan in wake of the threat of the new Covid-19 variant Omicron. The new Category C list includes Croatia, Hungary, Netherlands, Ukraine, Ireland, Slovenia, Vietnam, Poland, South Africa, Mozambique, Lesotho, Eswatini, Botswana, Zimbabwe and Namibia.



At the same time, the government has approved some travel relaxations to facilitate stranded Pakistanis. All Pakistanis can travel from Category C countries without exemption until 15 December. Pakistanis already in Category C countries on short-term visa and deportees have been permitted to travel back without an exemption process.

Pakistanis unable to get themselves vaccinated abroad (all categories) due to expired visa/Emirates ID or illegal immigrants/deportees, pending court cases, medical conditions, pregnancy or partial vaccination from Pakistan have also been exempted from mandatory vaccination if they show valid proof to airline/immigration authorities before boarding.

The United Kingdom, United States, Canada, Russia, European Union nations and a host of other countries have also

restricted travel for visitors from southern Africa.

Health authorities have concluded that Omicron variant is spreading fast across the globe and the only protection against it is vaccination and protective measures including wearing facemasks, social distancing and hand washing. Federal and provincial governments have already launched a special campaign to implement obligatory regime that started from December 1.

The NCOC instructed the provinces and authorities concerned to show a 'zero tolerance' policy regarding an obligatory vaccination regime. The government has set up call centres to reach out to people who have not got their second dose. A total of 40 call centres have been established across the country to ensure a second dose of the vaccine.

Federal Minister Asad Umer in his message stated "It is my appeal to Pakistanis, particularly those who have gotten one dose to get the second dose because this is one effective thing that can thwart dangers related to this variant."

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan says the new variant is being treated as a 'variant of concern' because it is spreading faster in the world compared to previous variants.

He said the situation can mount pressure on the healthcare system that could potentially lead to a shortage of beds and other medical services.

"An analysis of the variant's genetic makeup had shown numerous mutations. It seems there are mutations in certain areas [of the virus] that have the potential of making it more dangerous or transmissible," he said.

The Sindh health department is the first to decide to inoculate all people with a booster shot of Pfizer in view of the increased risk of transmission and re-infection posed by Omicron.

Currently, there are 1,287,393 confirmed coronavirus cases out of which 11,826 are 'active' cases in Pakistan. The number of patients who have lost their lives is 28,784 while 1,246,783 patients have fully recovered from the disease.



# Is Pakistan's Progressive Gender Law Too Permissive?

*A recent progressive law based on the concept of gender sovereignty is under attack from the religious right.*

By Mishaal Ashraf

For the first time in 2018, a new law allowed individuals – who suffer the consequences of their gender socially, psychologically, emotionally, and spiritually – a say in determining their gender, rather than being beholden to official or medical authorities assigning gender at birth.

The Transgender Persons (Protection of Rights) Act was hailed by human rights groups and activists nationally and internationally. But a crusading lawmaker would see that change.

Senator Mushtaq Ahmad Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) has moved a bill in the Senate of Pakistan to amend the law so withdraw the concerned individual's right to have a say in the matter.

The putative amendment seeks to mandate a medical board to decide “whether a person's gender should change, instead of them seeking a reassignment on the basis of their personal identity.”

Currently, the law says, “A person recognized as transgender...shall have (the) right to get himself or herself registered as per self-perceived gender identity with all government departments including, but not limited to, NADRA (National Database and Registration Authority).”

The JI Senator, however, believes the law promotes “gay and lesbian culture.”

“We know about cases in which a man changed his sex to a woman and then married a man,” he told Deutsche Welle's Urdu website, asserting that this “un-Islamic” practice could not be tolerated in the country.

The bill requires medical boards set up at district levels consisting of a professor doctor, a psychologist, a male general surgeon, a female general surgeon, and a chief medical officer after the approval by the Prime Minister and the four provincial Chief Ministers.

Senator Ahmad said the amended bill seeks prohibition of surgeries related to genital features on the basis of “any psychological disorder or gender dysphoria”. He argued that the current form of law may lead to the “legalization of homosexual marriages”.

He further criticized the law in practice saying that it violated the dignity of Muslim women and was in contradiction to the teachings of Islam. The Senator said that at present, people seek to get reassignment surgeries as a result of “personal thoughts” when in reality it is a biological matter.

The proposed amendment was condemned by the Minister of Human Rights, Shireen Mazari. She defended the current law and stated, “Till date, not a single complaint has been received regarding the misuse of this existing law”.

In 2012, transgender people were given the same rights as their cisgender counterparts, including the right to vote and to inherit property.



In 2016, Muslim clerics issued a fatwa legalizing transgender marriage. The clerics also declared, “making noises at transgender people, making fun of them, teasing them, or thinking of them as inferior is against sharia law”.

In 2017, they were included in the national census, and in 2018, the Transgender Rights Protection Act was passed. The Act was seen as a revolutionary step undertaken by the Pakistani Parliament.

“Before this law, a lot of people like me were in ‘the closet’”, says Saro Imran, an Islamabad-based trans activist, adding that the new law gave a lot of transgender people the courage to come out and to own their identity.

On paper, Pakistan has passed progressive laws to protect the trans community. However, the on-ground situation is very different. In recent years, the transgender community has been on the receiving end of brutal attacks, especially in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP).

Nazo, a trans woman was hacked to death in 2018, making her the 62nd transgender to be murdered in the province since 2015. Alisha, a 23-year old trans girl from KP was shot seven times by a gang in 2016. She was rushed to the hospital but bled to death as the hospital staff argued over whether to treat her in the men's ward or women's ward.

The Transgender Rights Protection Act 2018 did target major areas like health, education, prisons, and family law, but activists had to campaign for its implementation at provincial level.

According to the data shared with the Senate, 16,530 cases of gender change from male to female were processed, 12,154 cases of female to male, 21 cases of transgender to male, 9 cases of male to transgender, and as many cases of transgender to female.

# Achievements and Schisms of Muslim World

(In continuation to the last article)

By Azmat M Saqib

**Decline, modernization and dissolution (1828-1908-1924):** during the Tanzimat period (1839-1876), the government's series of constitutional reforms led to a modern conscripted army, banking system reforms, the decriminalization of homosexuality, the replacement of religious law with secular law and guilds with modern factories. A reformist constitution short lived and was suspended by the Sultan after 2 years. Wars in Crimea and Caucasia brought millions of refugees into Turkey from these regions. During these wars, Ottomans had to take loans from European banks. In 1875, the Empire declared bankruptcy. By 1881, the Ottoman Empire agreed to have its debt controlled by an institution known as Ottoman Public Debt Administration (OPDA), a council controlled by France and Britain. After the Russo-Turkish war (1877-1878) resulting in Ottoman defeat, Bulgaria, Romania, Serbia, Montenegro, Bosnia-Herzegovina, all declared independence one after the other. After the Empire lost the first Balkan war (1912-1913), it lost all of its territories except East Thrace (European part of Turkey). The Empire lost its North African territories in Italo-Turkish war (1911).

The Ottoman Empire entered WWI on the side of the Central Powers and was ultimately defeated. Egypt and Cyprus were made British protectorate. Arab revolt (1916-1918) eventually resulted in losing most of the Arab lands to British and France. Ottomans were blamed for massacre of 1.5 million Armenians and Syrian Christians as well as Greek and Assyrian minorities in 1915 and later.

Political struggle of Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and later joined by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk eventually led to a constitutional Caliphate in 1922 and under pressure from Britain it was abolished in 1924.

Unlike other parts of the world, Islam spread in Southeast Asia without a major conquest. It came on ships and boats, it travelled with spices and silk, there was hardly any bloodshed. The benefit of aligning with rising Muslim powers was obvious to the local rulers, but Sufis played an important role too.

In sixteenth century a local ruler of north Sumatra Sultan Malik al Saleh (a convert) is often cited as the one who made inroads in the region. The 15th century Muslim Chinese admiral Zheng He is often credited for helping spread Islam in the Indonesian island of Java. Indonesians and Malays enjoyed trade links with the Arabs and Persians.

Threatened by Hindu Empires of South East Asia, Indonesia no longer wanted to pay tribute to Hindus and Buddhist rulers from the Mainland. And so they looked for political allies in the Middle East. Besides Sufism, puppetry used for story telling in Indonesia also played a key role in the spread of Islam.

Sultanate of Aceh was centered in modern day Indonesian province of Aceh, a major regional power in the 16th and 17th centuries. The Sultanate of Sulu was a Muslim state that



ruled the island in Sulu archipelago, parts of Mindanao (in Philippines), certain portions of Palawan and Northeastern Borneo (certain parts of Sabah and north Kalimantan). From 1405 till 1915 the sultanate existed.

Individual Arab traders, including sahabas, preached in Malay Archipelago. It is commonly held that Islam first arrived in Malay Peninsula in 12th century when Sultan Mudzafar Shah of Kedah ruled, the first ruler to be known to convert to Islam after being introduced to Islam by Indian Muslim traders. By the 15th and 16th centuries Islam was the majority faith of the Malay people.

## MUSLIMS CONTRIBUTION TO THE WORLD CIVILIZATION

Unlike Judaism and Christianity Islamic injunctions of Quran and Sunnah (practices of Prophet of Islam) encompass both religion and state matters and were implemented not just in theory but also in the whole society. Paulian Christianity divorced itself from collective systems of Torah and Talmud, resulting in separation of Church and State. Jews after 70 AD were in Diaspora; hence collective systems of Judaism were suspended. A Caliph after the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) exercised both temporal and spiritual authority over the whole life, public and private, of a Muslim. This continued till 1922, when Mustafa Kamal Pasha abrogated the Caliphate system, nation states appeared and Muslim countries adopted secularism based systems.

When judging the caliphate system according to Islamic principles, thirty years of rule by the Rashidun Caliphs was the best period. Temporal and spiritual principles were in unison and the caliphs were accountable to the populace for every action. But after Amir Muawiya, the caliphate became a dynastic affair. Principles of Islamic polity at highest level of governance were compromised. Rivalry of the Umayyad and Hashemite surfaced during Umayyad and Abbasside Caliphates. First few rulers of both dynasties persecuted their



opponents ruthlessly. Sometimes, even a new caliph if opposed to the policies of previous one would persecute the notables of the last caliph. Conquerors of Africa, Spain and Sindh, Musa bin Nusayr, Tariq bin Zeya and Muhammad bin Qasim respectively met the fate of dihard criminals by the new caliph Suleiman bin Abdul Malik.

Yet the state structures of judiciary, executive functions at all levels, public welfare, infrastructure development, education and scholarship kept on progressing and they peaked in 10th, 11th centuries first in Baghdad and in Muslim Spain. Intellectuals of all religions and races gathered in Baghdad as well as in the Golden triangle Cordoba, Seville and Toledo (Spain). During the Umayyad era elementary education and literary Arabic language education were well in place and system of higher level scholarly activities and institutions became prevalent during Abbasid era as well as in Umayyad dynasty In Spain. Bait al Hikmat (House of Wisdom) was the center where scientific books and philosophical works from Greece, Rome, India and China were translated into Arabic. Haroon Ur Rashid and Mamun Ur Rashid, the Abbasid Caliphs were themselves scholars. A political scholars and intellectuals were patronized fully in their intellectual endeavors and imparting education to thousands of eager students.

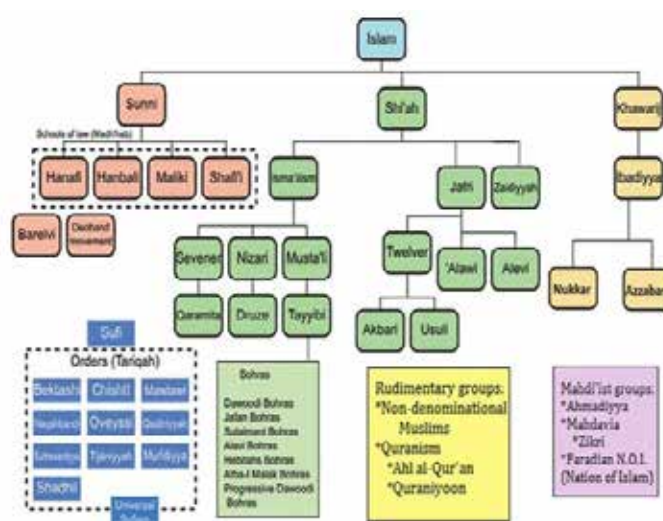
During Umayyad era, education and intellectual activity was patronized mostly by rich nobles and sometimes the state. During Abbasid era patronage by the state increased manifolds. Under the influence of Seljuks, their vizier Nuzam ul Mulk tuis Madricasa Nizamia schools with prescribed syllabus encompassing religious and modern education of the time proliferated for mass education. World's first universities were established at Cairo (Jamia Azhar) and Fez in Morocco.

For several countries Muslim scholars led the world in the fields of Mathematics, Astronomy, Geography, medicine, optics, philosophy, history, sociology, art of warfare and sea faring etc. ottomans introduced the first modern standing army concept in the form of Janissaries. For several centuries Mediterranean Ocean was dominated by Muslim navies and the Muslims greatly benefitted financially from the trade between west and east. But Europe started overtaking the Muslim civilization by late sixteenth century. Till that time Muslim armies both on land and sea controlled lands around Mediterranean rim central Asia, Middle East till south Asia and the adjacent seas.

## Schisms of the Muslim past

First differences among the companions of the Prophet (Peace Be upon Him (PBUH)) arose when first caliph was to be appointed after Prophet's death. Allegiance to Abu Bakar (may Allah be pleased with him) was withheld for six months by Prophet's cousin and Son in law Ali (Allah be pleased with him). But then he gave allegiance to all the caliphs before him. During last Rashidun Caliph Ali's reign, two wars among the Prophet's companions created the first schisms resulting in She'an-Ali (Partisans of Ali) and Kharijis. She'an-e-Ali was a dissident group who felt Ali and his progeny were the rightful contenders of caliphate after Prophet's death. After Shahadat of Caliph Ali, They developed into a distinct sect named Shia (10% of Muslim world population and considered the direct descendants of Ali as Imams, who were innocent and

infallible. Largest of the Shia sect are Isna Ash'ari (Twelver) and believe in 12 Imams. Zaidiyah (25% in Yemen) believe in 5 Imams, presently they are closer to Sunni sect. Ismailia Shias rose at one point to become the largest branch of Shia Islam, climaxing as a political power with the Fatimid Caliphate (in Egypt and North Africa) in the 10th through 12th centuries. The Ismailia and the Twelvers both accept the same six initial imams, the Ismailia accept Ismail ibn Jaffar as the seventh Imam. After the death of Muhammad Ibn Ismail in the 8th century CE, the teachings of Ismailia further transformed into the belief system which is known today, concentrating more on the esoteric meaning (batin) of the Islamic faith. They belief more in the "Imam of the time". Presently the larger sect of Ismail is the Nizari, who recognize Prince Agha khan IV as the 49th hereditary Imam. They are now in minority to Twelvers and are present all over the Muslim world. Twelvers are literalist and Akhbari groups focusing on Divine law (Sharia), deeds and saying of the Prophet (Sunnah) and the twelve Imams.



The other schism resultant of two civil wars were kharijis. They believed that if a Muslim leader sinned, it was the duty of Muslims to rebel against and depose him. From the times of Caliph Ali till the Abbasid period, militant groups of kharijites kept rebelling, but were eventually eliminated and were replaced by the non-activist Ibadiya who survive to this day in Oman and some parts of Africa.

Mainstream Muslims (90%) were later called Sunnis, for them nobody except Prophets of God are infallible. They believe the four Rashidun Caliphs are the rightly guided and their era as a model of Islamic state for all times to come. There are four schools of jurisprudence (Hanafi, Maliki, Shafi'i, and Hanbali). Wahhabis in Arabian peninsula emerged in 18th century and Ahle-Hadith in northern India in 19 century are Salafi movements who do not follow any of the four schools of jurisprudence, believe in ijihad and had doctrinal tendencies of Hambali school. But all Sunni sects mentioned above believe in Quran, Sunnah and the Rashidun caliphate, and differ in jurisprudence.

Druze, Alavi, Baha'i, Ahmadi are considered heretical. In Muslim history, except for Shia-Sunni wars, there is no history of armed religious conflicts between various sects. Shia-Sunni divide also overlaps with Persian - Arab conflicts. Except for almost 65 years of Fatimid rule of eleventh century Hejaz remained under Sunni rule.

# The Algorithm of Accountability

*The Rohingya lawsuit against Facebook is a sterling attempt at creating a disincentive to mass incitement of violence.*



By Momina Ashraf

Mark Zuckerberg was only 12 years old when Bill Gates wrote his now famous essay titled “Content is King”. Gates put down the crux of the piece very succinctly in the opening sentence, thus: “Content is where I expect much of the real money will be made on the Internet, just as it was in broadcasting.”

As years and decades passed by, his prophetic vision materialised and the title of his essay became the veritable mantra for everybody from top-flight social media execs to upstart bloggers.

Yet nobody would take it to heart quite as seriously as Zuckerberg, which is precisely why Facebook left every other social network in the dust to become the global behemoth it is today.

Now called Meta Platform, Inc., Facebook has perfected the art of aggregating and promoting content to a level where it is in a league of its own. Along the way, however, it seems this singular focus on optimally boosting content has blindsided the authors of its algorithms to the real-life consequences of inflammatory content.

Inflammatory content by definition evokes stronger reactions – measured in terms of likes, shares, and comments. In Facebook jargon, this is called engagement – and its algorithms have been designed to boost more engaging content ever wider.

This has earned Facebook the ire of centrist and left-wing politicians and commentators from the United States to Europe. Facebook’s pushback is predictable.

“Right-wing populism is always more engaging,” a Facebook executive recently told reporters. According to POLITICO, the person said this kind of content speaks to “an incredibly strong, primitive emotion” by touching on such topics as “nation, protection, the other, anger, fear.”

Damn right, and Facebook is only too glad for such content, unmindful of its real life consequences.

“The ugly truth is that we believe in connecting people so deeply that anything that allows us to connect more people more often is de facto good,” senior Facebook executive Andrew Bosworth wrote in an internal memo

according to Columbia Journalism Review, “even if ‘someone dies in a terrorist attack coordinated on our tools’.”

This is precisely the scenario invoked by a complaint filed in California’s San Mateo County on behalf of about 10,000 Rohingya refugees, alleging the social media giant overlooked the hate speech on its platform and was “willing to trade the lives of the Rohingya people for better market penetration” in Myanmar.

The suit is part of a multi-country effort, demanding a total of USD 150 billion in compensation for the harms their people suffered as a result of the company’s inaction.

Lawyers representing the Rohingya community argue that Facebook’s algorithms amplified hate speech against the Rohingya people; that the company failed to hire moderators familiar with the political and cultural situations in Myanmar; and that Facebook failed to “take appropriate and timely action” to remove posts or ban accounts that incited violence against the Rohingya.



The claims are in line with the findings of a report by a United Nations fact-finding mission on the causes and consequences of extensive human-rights violations against the Rohingya community in Myanmar, released in 2018.

In the report, the mission, chaired by Indonesian lawyer and human rights campaigner Marzuki Darusman recommended investigating and prosecuting Myanmar military leaders for a range of violations, including genocide.

It confirmed more than ten thousand Rohingya Muslims had been tortured and killed and hundreds of thousands displaced as a result of a genocidal campaign orchestrated by the country's top military leadership.

Among the contributing factors identified by the UN mission were hate speech and propaganda, spread through Facebook pages and accounts maintained by members of Myanmar's government and its military police, known as the Tatmadaw.

UN observers said these accounts and pages helped to foment violence and hatred against the Rohingya for months, if not years. Although Facebook eventually took action to ban some of the most egregious examples, a lot of damage had already been done, according to an internal report of its own about that time, prepared by an independent non-profit called Business for Social Responsibility. The report had found

"[Facebook] weren't doing enough to help prevent our platform from being used to foment division and incite offline violence."

The company apologized for not doing more to prevent violence being fuelled by its platform, and promised to expand its policies and add more moderation resources in Myanmar.

The US lawsuit asks for at least USD 150 billion in damages for "wrongful death, personal injury, pain and suffering, emotional distress, and loss of property."

The complaint reveals that the Myanmar military regime "employed hundreds of people, some posing as celebrities, to operate fake Facebook accounts and to generate hateful and dehumanizing content about the Rohingya," and quotes the UN report from 2018 as saying that Facebook's central role in the daily lives and information consumption of Myanmar citizens meant it "played a determining role in the genocide."

It relies in part on an affidavit filed with the US Securities and Exchange Commission by a former Facebook staffer, who said "Facebook executives were fully aware that posts ordering hits by the Myanmar government on the minority Muslim Rohingya were spreading wildly on Facebook," and that the issue of hate speech directed at members of the Rohingya community "was well known inside the company for years."

The complaint shows that Facebook was warned by many organizations working in the country that hate speech was circulating on the platform but took no corrective action.

"Despite having been repeatedly alerted between 2013 and 2017 to the vast quantities of anti-Rohingya hate speech and misinformation on its system... Facebook barely reacted," it says.

Facebook's CEO Mark Zuckerberg told a 2018 Senate hearing the company was doing as much as it could to stem hate speech in Myanmar, including adding more local moderators.

However, a Reuters' investigation several months after this statement found that thousands of comments, images, and other posts calling for violence against the Rohingya were still being published on the platform.

Around the time the news of the suit broke, Meta Platforms, Inc., said it had banned all Myanmar military-controlled businesses from having a presence on its platforms. This was a measure the UN special mission had recommended way back in 2018.

Ours is a world increasingly ruled by algorithms, which can neither be punished nor rewarded. However, those designing and training these algorithms should have no misgivings as to their culpability – and the Rohingya lawsuit should be lauded as an attempt to drive that point home.



# Actor Par Excellence, Heartthrob Extraordinaire, Bilal Abbas Khan

*Meet the actor who dreams of playing a cricketer one of these days.*



By **Kaukab Jahan**

**B**ilal Abbas Khan is one of those Pakistani actors, who has earned a name in a very short span of time. Although he started his career doing supporting roles in dramas, he was able to capture leading roles because of his passion and top-notch acting skills.

His plays *O Rangreza* (2017), *Balaa* (2018), *Cheekh* (2019), *Pyar Ke Sadqe* (2020), *Dunk* (2020), the recent *Dobara* are ample testimony to his acting prowess.

Khan has just released his second feature film *Khel Khel Mein* opposite Sajal Aly. The film is directed and produced by filmmaker duo Nabeel Qureshi and Fizza Ali Meerza.

Another recognition of his talent came in the form of Lux Style Award for Best Actor Male (Jury) for *Pyar Ke Sadqay*.

This year, a UK based magazine *Eastern Eye* featured him in its list of “30 under 30 Global Asian Stars”, along with four other Pakistani celebrities.

The Truth International talked to this young and energetic actor about his current projects and the future plans.

**TTI: Why was there such a huge gap of five years between your first and second film?**

**BAK:** To be honest, I didn’t like any script in the middle. We were struggling very hard in films during that period. I am sure every actor wants to do film but because of the uncertain

condition of the film industry, my desire to be a film star diminished for the time being. So I decided to wait for a good script at the right time and focused on television and eventually got a good response. When Nabeel Qureshi and Fizza Ali Meerza approached me, I could not say no to them.

**TTI: What did you like in the script?**

**BAK:** Besides the script and my role, it is very important for me who is doing this project and what it is all about. So it was the whole package from the story to direction and acting margin that enticed me to say yes to this project.

**TTI: What is your character in the film?**

**BAK:** It is very simple. I am playing a college-going boy named Saad who belongs to a very affluent family but wants to become an actor instead of taking over his father’s huge business.

**TTI: Your successful drama career started from *O Rangreza*, in which Sajal Aly was playing opposite you. She is again with you in *Khel Khel Mein*. So, do you believe that this will be the start of your successful film career?**

**BAK:** (Laughs) I hope so! Sajal and I are working together after four years. The response and admiration of our drama was very positive. I am also hopeful about the film as well. Until now, it has garnered a good response even from Bangladesh.



**TTI: Your character Mahir in the drama serial Dohara is having a romantic affair with a much older woman than you. What is the response you are getting for this role?**

**BAK:** People always criticize. They will even criticize the color and design of my jersey. So I don't care about what others are saying. Mahir is just a character for me. Moreover, I found the story very interesting and different. It is a well-established script in which both characters have their situations, dynamics, and reasoning. My team is very talented from writer to director to the cast. Seriously, when I read the script, I decided that I must do this role. I don't find anything wrong in it.

**TTI: You have recently won the Lux Style Jury Award for best male actor. Does it satisfy your inner artist or put more responsibility as an actor to prove yourself more?**

**BAK:** To be honest, this award has not given me just satisfaction, but yes the responsibility threefold. Even if I had not won the award, as an actor I already feel a lot of responsibility on my shoulders. As a public figure, we must try to talk very carefully as I believe our words matter very much to people. If we talk or do something carelessly or wrong, we can become a bad influence on the masses. So although I feel privileged to receive this award, but yes responsibility is always there besides every success.

**TTI: You were also included in the list of 'Top 30 Under 30 Global Asian Stars' by UK based Magazine 'Eastern Eye'. Wasn't it a surprise for you?**

**BAK:** Yes, it was quite surprising for me. One fine morning I woke up and checked my social media as usual and found that it had happened. It was a great feeling. A Proud moment.

**TTI: You are among few actors who have worked on all genres like television, film, telefilm and web series at the start of their careers. What is your preference?**

**BAK:** There is no specific preference. I feel our entertainment industry is growing in a very different way. Honestly, right now, I don't keep any difference among them very much.

I have great faith in Pakistani films and genuinely believe the next couple of years will be fantastic for our industry. Good films will be made and people will return to cinema houses to watch them.

As far as our dramas are concerned, there is good and average work as well. I always used to complain about the lack of good scripts but now many fresh ideas are coming up there as well. We also have very fitting content for the web as well.

In conclusion, our drama has always been very established, and the film industry is all set to make its spurs in the next few years. So wherever I get a good script, I will do it irrespective of the format.

**TTI: What is your dream role?**

**BAK:** I always wanted to do a project in which I play the role of a cricketer and might be doing one. It is one of my dream roles.

**TTI: Any cricketer you want to portray?**

**BAK:** My personal favourites are Babar Azam and Asif Ali. I would love to portray them.





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