

The Truth International

1st - 15th December 2021

Legislation at large
Parliament passes 33 bills in a row

IMF Conditions
Dollars for aid & trade costing high inflation

Audios & Videos of Politics
Judiciary facing an audio & a retired judge's accusations

An Eventful November



Rs. 435

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

🌐 www.thetruthinternational.com ☎ +92 51 2820180-1



FUELLING THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

Mari Petroleum plays a pivotal role in ensuring food security of Pakistan as more than 90% urea production in the Country is based on MPCL supplied gas.



MARI PETROLEUM COMPANY LIMITED



051 111-410-410



info@mpcl.com.pk



mpcl.com.pk

CONTENTS

Editorial

Judiciary under Trial by Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 04**

City Notes

Counting on the same page by M.A. Niazi – **Page 05**

Politics

The Government' Incredible Legislative Spree by Khalid Wasim – **Page 06**

Opposition's Great Expectations Dashed Yet Again by Naveed Miraj – **Page 09**

When Life Gives You a Lemon Orchard, Start a Lemonade Stand by Zain Rihat – **Page 10**

EVMs to What End? By Sarfraz Raja – **Page 12**

Economy

Khan Ready to Bite the Bullet of IMF Pre-Conditions by Khalique Ahmad – **Page 14**

Why Fanning Public Anger Over Inflation is a Mistake by Fahad Thaheem – **Page 16**

Economy's Direction Right but Domestic Market Stressed for Now by Javed Mahmood – **Page 17**

Can Cryptomining be Pakistan's Billion-Dollar Opportunity? By Javed Mahmood – **Page 19**

Will the Planet be Best Left to Gen Z? Desk Report – **Page 21**

Foreign Affairs

Into the Wrong Turn by Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi – **Page 22**

Will There Ever be a Reckoning for War Crimes in Afghanistan? TTI Report – **Page 24**

Can Pakistan Lead a Multilateral Initiative to Avert Catastrophe in Afghanistan? Desk Report – **Page 30**

Is a New Cold War Inevitable? By Umer Farooq – **Page 32**

China's Principled Position on Syria by Hamzah Rifaat Hussain – **Page 34**

Did the Abraham Accords Leave Palestinians in the Lurch? by Momina Ashraf – **Page 35**

Investigation

FBR's Big-Ticket POS System Falls on the First Hurdle by Azeem Waqas – **Page 36**

A Dark Cloud Over Judiciary that has a Silver Lining by Asadullah – **Page 38**

Environment

The Mixed Bag of COP26 by Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 40**

Will COP26 be Enough to Save the Civilisation? By Mishaal Ashraf – **Page 41**

An Air of Hazard - TTI Report – **Page 43**

Education

Some Are More Unequal - TTI Report – **Page 44**

Health

Why Europe is Bracing for Another Winter of Covid-19 by Ayesha Javaid – **Page 46**

History

Caliphates and sultanates of non Arab world by Azmat M Saqib – **Page 48**

Heritage

The Drive to Restore Lahore's Priceless Heritage by Muhammad Zahid Rifat – **Page 50**

Sports

The UAE Phenomenon of the Cricketing World by Ali Abdullah – **Page 52**

Entertainment

Thespianz' Comedy Tackles the Issues of Youth and Age in One Go by Faisal Malik – **Page 53**

The Looming Hazards of Stealing Fire from the Gods Desk Report – **Page 54**

Publisher: Muhammad Fahad Thaheem

Editor: Zaheer ud Din Babar Thaheem

Advisor to Editor: Ashraf Malkham

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

Judiciary under Trial

By Hammad Ghaznavi



What former chief justice of the supreme court, Saqib Nisar, is allegedly saying in the recently released audio clip sounds like the biggest crime even in a democratic dispensation considered rather imperfect. All the major institutions of the state, particularly the judiciary, can ignore the audio leak at the peril of their image and credibility, already in seriously bad shape. The judiciary cannot brush any more garbage under the carpet, as there are heaps of rubbish already hidden there.

Ahmed Noorani, an investigative journalist, released an audio clip allegedly that of Saqib Nisar on a website, FactFocus, wherein Saqib Nisar as CJ directing some judge that Nawaz Sharif and Maryum Nawaz are to be jailed at all costs; and 'they' want to put Imran Khan into power. Expected reactions came from Saqib Nisar who called the audio 'fabricated', Prime Minister Imran Khan who termed the audio leak a 'drama', and PML-N projected it as another proof of the electoral fraud of 2018, and complete innocence of their leader.

Is the audio genuine? Noorani got its forensic audit from a relevant company in USA and released that report as well. Saqib Nisar has not taken or indicated at legal action against the 'fabricated' audio. The judiciary is completely silent on the 'audio'. Nawaz Sharif and co want the Courts to take suo moto action to look into the matter and get the audio

examined to authenticate its veracity, if any. While the PTI is daring the PML-N to itself take it to the court. There is a catch in it. The strict parameters set by former CJ Asif Saeed Khosa regarding Judge Arshad Malik's video, have made the admissibility of audio/video evidence in courts nearly impossible.

Details apart, the issue shall not be looked at as another government-opposition point scoring opportunity. Much more is at stake. It is not just one audio clip. A string of similar evidence is emanating quite frequently of late. Before this audio came the affidavit of former Gilgit-Baltistan CJ, claiming that Saqib Nisar as CJ supreme court ordered the supreme court registrar, besides a judge at the Islamabad High Court, not to give bails to Maryam Nawaz and Nawaz Sharif until 2018 general elections are over. Accountability court Judge Arshad Malik's video with similar charges of coercion to give a verdict against Nawaz Sharif was also not probed into, though Arshad Malik was released from service due to 'misconduct', and termed a smudge on the face of the judiciary by the then CJ Asif Khosa.

Lies and truth and tapes apart, what a serving judge of IHC Sahukat Siddiqui said in person, in writing, in Supreme Judicial Council went unheeded. Instead of hearing his case, he was booted out. His pension and perks are seized. In a word, he also alleged that powerful

quarters were twisting the arm of the judiciary to get a verdict against Nawaz Sharif. The curious case of Justice Faiz Esa sums up the institutional crisis the judiciary today is faced with.

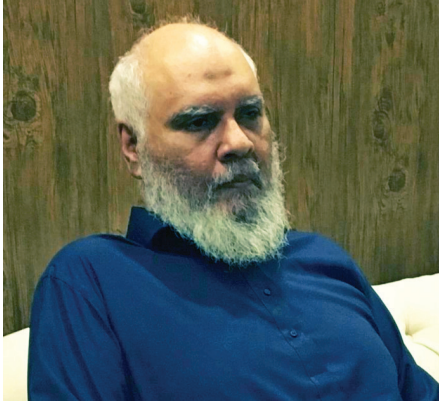
There is not a lot to be happy about our judiciary, with its 130th position in the world ranking as a judicial system. With over 2 million cases pending in Pakistani courts, the judiciary needs to do a lot to restore its image. The allegations of being in cahoots with the powerful quarters are not new for the judiciary – the Supreme Court of Pakistan has always been slated for validating four martial laws in the country.

Despite its various frailties, however, the judiciary has to be resuscitated to make it a functional institution, people of Pakistan can look up to for justice. It certainly is a long and tiring journey. Institutions don't earn credibility overnight. But the first step in the right direction will not go unnoticed. Can the supreme court turn this 'onslaught' on its image and credibility to its advantage? Can the present deepening institutional crisis be converted into a blessing in disguise by starting the process of fixing it?

A former chief justice is being accused of a most heinous crime, that of tampering with the system of justice and siding with the Powerful instead of the constitution. 'Unfortunately, let me be a little blunt about it,' it's the Judiciary under trial.

CITY NOTES: Counting on the same page

By M.A. Niazi



What happened at the joint session will always be held up as an example of democracy in action? The PTI will be able to pull aside foreign delegates and force them to listen to another expounding of how democracy can be used to yield positive results.

The Supreme Court may be asked to adjudicate on whether Speaker Asad Qaiser can count or not. It was also interesting to see PM's Parliamentary Affairs Adviser Babar Awan, who is not a member of either House of Parliament, conduct the proceedings, raking up the seat which the Constitution undoubtedly gives him, but which unelected Advisers don't take up out of a consideration for the proprieties.

The interesting thing is that the Minister in-charge, Azam Swati, was present as a member of the Senate. He obviously felt he couldn't handle the marathon task, and left it to Dr Awan. I wonder not just why Mr Swati left his chance to shine to Dr Awan

(and boy, do politicians love a moment in the sun!), but why the PTI could not find an elected member to conduct its business. It gives me the feeling that if Imran could have managed it, he would have preferred not to have to mind a constituency. Perhaps that is why he would prefer the presidential system. The whole country votes for the President, not just one constituency.

But be that as it may, the whole process was magnificently managed. It was proved beyond all reasonable doubt that the government is on the same page as you-know-who. Particularly important was the Electronic Voting Machines Act, and the i-voting for overseas Pakistanis, which will ensure that any future government elected will also be on the same page.

Being on the same page is important. All those blaming certain individuals for imposing Imran on us should realize that if they had remained on the chase page, no one would have been forced to bring Imran. So actually, it's their fault that we've got Imran.

What does Imran have to offer if it's not being on the same page? His economic policy? The anti-corruption drive which has not led to a single conviction so far? The secret of reverse swing? Or a cure for cancer? I wonder if the ECP can deliver on the EVMs. I wouldn't be surprised if the Election Commission can do it. Not because they're pro-Nawaz, or because they expect a rake-off from the EVM contract (as Azam Swati and Fawad

Chaudhry said), but because it has so many bureaucrats, whose ability to actually do anything is a little doubtful. The ECP needs to get on the same page, and deliver positive results. It must give up this strange fixation about free and fair elections, and remember that polls are held only so that no action under Article 6 be taken. True, Article 6 may not mean much, after General Musharraf got away, but the sentence passed on him will haunt all his successors.

Still, there are some untidy remnants of the past. Look at what Rana Shamim, an ex-chief judge of Gilgit-Baltistan, has been saying about ex-CJP Mr Justice Saqib Nisar. All I can say is that Rana Shamim was obviously not on the same page. If you look at the subtext of what he said, it shows that certain people or organizations can get whatever judgments they want. The present Chief Justice's firm rebuttal nonetheless, and his declaration that justice is being done, indicate that somebody was not fit to hold judicial office. Justice is a funny thing. It is being done if judgments are made in our favour, but not if against us. Doing justice can come into conflict with remaining on the same page.

One person who seems to want to stay on the same page is Indian PM Narendra Modi, who finally gave in to the demands of Indian farmers to repeal legislation they didn't like. The Opposition is exploring avenues, but I don't think mobilising farmers is a priority. The Opposition is also seeking ways of getting on the same page.

The Truth International

Do You Want to Write a blog for us ?

Please contribute at Blogger Desk: Info@tti.org.pk

The Government' Incredible Legislative Spree

The treasury zipped 33 bills through a joint session of parliament, leaving the opposition in the dust.



By Khalid Wasim

Wednesday, 17 November 2021 will be remembered in the parliamentary history of Pakistan as the day the most productive session of parliament was held.

On that day, Prime Minister Imran Khan's coalition government managed to breeze a record 33 bills through a joint sitting of parliament, called expressly for this purpose on sixteen hours' notice, while the opposition appeared to be at sea.

The opposition cried foul, calling it an undemocratic move in contravention of parliamentary norms, and vowed to move court over the matter. The one thing they could not do was offer competent resistance.

As if to press home the point, the government powered four more bills through the opposition-controlled senate two days later.

The month of November began with the Khan's government in hot water over its bad handling of the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) agitation as well as due to the growing inflation and price hike in the country.

There was talk in Islamabad's political circles that the Prime Minister Imran Khan, who presides over a coalition government led by his Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI), no more enjoyed the backing of the establishment.

The general feeling was that his government will not be able to pass its pet electoral reforms bills through the joint sitting of the parliament.

The repeated adjournments of the National Assembly and the Senate proceedings due to lack of quorum ahead of the joint sitting further strengthened the impression that the Khan was losing grip of his parliamentarians.

The opposition and the media kept on reporting that the treasury members had lost interest in the proceedings of the parliament, mostly because of the public outrage over the government's back-to-back decisions to increase oil prices.

On 10 November, the Supreme Court in a significant and unexpected development summoned the Prime Minister on mere hours' notice and

grilled him over his government's inaction against those responsible for the Army Public School (APS) attack in 2014 and the ongoing talks with the Tehreek-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Chief Justice of Pakistan Gulzar Ahmed Khan said, "You are in power. The government is also yours. What did you do? You brought those guilty to the negotiating table."

"The satisfaction of the parents [who lost their children in the APS attack] is necessary," said another judge addressing the PM. The court then set a four-week timeframe for the government to submit a report on the matter.

Then came the day when the government faced defeat twice in the National Assembly during the vote on the motions to introduce private member's bills. Taking the floor after announcement of the result of the vote by the chair, PML-N stalwart Ayaz Sadiq termed it a "moral victory" of the opposition and asked the PM to resign on moral grounds.

However, only two days after facing an embarrassing defeat at the hands of the



opposition in the National Assembly, an over-confident government convened a joint sitting of the parliament on 11 November to pass more than two dozen bills, including the electoral reforms bills seeking to introduce electronic voting machines (EVMs) and I-voting for the overseas Pakistanis.

Most of these bills had already been adopted in the National Assembly but could not pass by the Senate within the stipulated 90-day constitutional period.

The government, however, had to postpone the joint session within 24 hours of its summoning after the reports that its allies, including the Pakistan Muslim League-Q (PML-Q) and the Muttehid Qaumi Movement (MQM), had expressed some reservations over the proposed use of EVMs in the elections and had sought time for in-house consultations.

Announcing to postpone the joint sitting, the government ministers stated that the government had done so in order to provide another opportunity to the opposition to discuss the electoral reforms issue to reach consensus over the EVM and i-voting bills.

The announcement about the postponement of joint session came from Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry through a tweet hours after Prime Minister Imran Khan presided over a meeting of parliamentarians belonging to the PTI and allied parties, which was attended by over 150 members. In the meeting, the PM had

asked the lawmakers to participate in the legislation business considering it a jihad.

“Electoral reforms is an issue linked to the country’s future. We are working in good faith to reach a consensus (with the opposition) on this issue,” said the information minister, adding National Assembly Speaker Asad Qaiser had been asked to contact the opposition again so that they could move the poll reforms bills with consensus.

On the other hand, the opposition claimed that the government had “run away” from the joint sitting due to the successful strategy adopted by the joint opposition to ensure presence of its members in Islamabad and due to its contacts with the government allies.

PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari even claimed the opposition had succeeded in convincing the allies about dangerous consequences of unilateral electoral reforms regarding the use of EVMs and the government’s efforts to make the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) controversial.

The opposition claimed that not only the allies, but the PTI’s own members were not ready to support the controversial legislations. They also claimed that a number of treasury members were in contact with them and that the government would not succeed in its plan to bulldoze the legislations in the joint sitting.

The government played an intelligent trick.

On one hand, it engaged the opposition through the National Assembly speaker, and on the other hand, through some behind-the-scene management, it once again approached its allies.

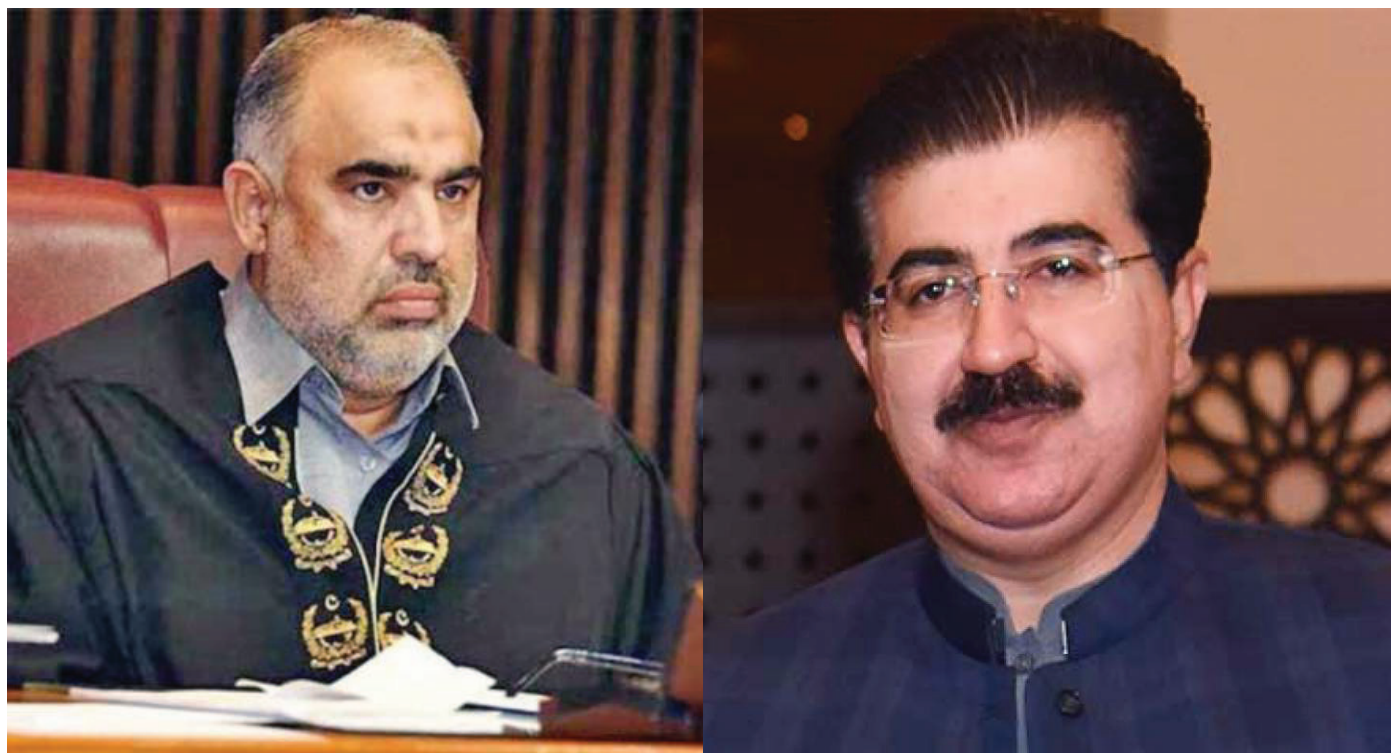
After assurances of support from its coalition partners, the government convened the much-anticipated joint session of parliament again on 17 November despite having a mere two-vote majority.

Heads of the component parties of the opposition Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) in a meeting expressed concern over reports that the state institutions were “forcing” the government’s allies to vote for the government-proposed controversial bills.

“The PDM does not approve of this kind of interference from the state institutions and considers such an act violation of the Constitution,” said the statement issued after the PDM meeting. The PDM leaders warned the state institutions to remain within their constitutional limits and not “test the patience of the people”.

A number of legislators in their private conversations confirmed that telephone calls were made to the members to ensure their presence during the joint sitting. JUI-F parliamentary leader in the National Assembly Asad Mehmood while speaking on the floor of the house only days before summoning of the joint sitting of the parliament had questioned the urgency being





shown by the government in passing the electoral reforms bills.

“Why there are talks that the government wants to get these bills passed before 19 November,” he said, in an apparent reference to the date on which Inter-Service Intelligence chief Lt Gen Faiz Hameed was to relinquish his charge of the ISI and move on to head the Peshawar Corps.

In the event, the government triumphed in getting through a record number of 33 bills, including the controversial bill on EVMs and i-voting for the overseas Pakistanis, from the joint sitting of parliament on 17 November after facing initial resistance from the opposition, which later resorted to a noisy protest and a token walkout from the house after failing to complete its numbers.

The opposition members made every effort to prevent the government from tabling the controversial bills and making their passage difficult, but after facing a 221-203 vote defeat on a motion moved by Adviser to the Prime Minister for Parliamentary Affairs Babar Awan seeking presentation of the Elections (Second Amendment) Bill, 2021, they preferred walking out of the main hall.

After a few minutes, the opposition members surprisingly returned and fully

participated in the house proceedings, allowing the treasury benches to complete the 72-point agenda without much difficulty.

Besides the bill on EVMs and overseas Pakistanis, the government also managed to breeze through the house the International Court of Justice (Review and Reconsideration) Bill-2021, aimed at providing right of appeal to the detained Indian spy Kulbhushan Jadhav in line with the decision of the International Court of Justice.

Two days later, the government again played cleverly and managed to push four bills through the opposition-dominated Senate by bringing these legislations through a supplementary agenda at a time when most of the opposition members had already left the Senate hall for Friday prayers or to proceed to their home constituencies.

The bills passed by the Senate included the National Accountability Bureau (NAB) Amendment Bill and Protection of Journalists and Media Professionals Bill.

The opposition and some political experts believe that these successes of the government are temporary and short-lived and that Imran Khan will not be able to ensure

the use of EVMs in the next elections.

They are of the view that Imran Khan is insisting on the use of EVMs despite its opposition by the ECP and the other stakeholders only to make the next elections controversial. Some experts even see a conspiracy that the move can be a part of a larger plan to delay the general elections, due to be held in October 2023.

The opposition parties have announced to challenge the law before the Supreme Court and there is a possibility that the ECP may also approach the apex court for guidance over the issue.

It seems that ultimately the matter will land in the courts which are already under pressure due to recent controversies after surfacing of an affidavit by former chief judge of Gilgit-Baltistan Rana Shamim and the alleged leaked audio clip of the former chief justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar.

The opposition Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) is accusing Nisar of willfully denying bails to former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and his daughter Maryam Nawaz under pressure from certain “institutions” in order to keep them behind the bars until the completion of the election process in July 2018 to pave the way for the victory of the PTI.



Opposition's Great Expectations Dashed Yet Again

The detractors of Prime Minister Imran Khan may have to wait for the next election after all.

By Naveed Miraj

Everything is possible in this political game of chess and especially in our country, time has proved it time and again the unpredictability and volatility of the political situation.

But for the moment, the government which was on a weak footing a few days back amidst skyrocketing prices of essential commodities, appears to have maneuvered back to the strong footing, although the inflation issue persists.

The opposition, chomping at the bit to bring a no confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan a few days ago, seems again stuck with the same old strategy of mass protests, which has so far not borne any fruit for it.

The happenings of the last few days have thrown off the opposition's political calculus yet again. Especially the show of strength by the PTI government in the joint sitting of the parliament came as a rude shock for the opposition.

The government was able to pass a raft of bills at the joint sitting, including the electoral reforms bill envisaging use of EVMs in the general elections. It followed up on the signal victory by pushing through the opposition-majority senate the contentious NAB Amendment Bill.

Reports of a rupture between the government and the military leadership over the appointment of new DG ISI had given the

opposition new hopes of ousting Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The main opposition parties had enhanced the level of engagements at different levels to firm up a concerted anti-government strategy.

During the meetings, the opposition parties discussed various proposals including bringing a no confidence motion against Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, Chairman Senate Sadiq Sanjrani, and Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Given the double blow they suffered at the recent parliamentary proceedings, the chances of the opposition parties bringing a no confidence motion against any top government figure have dwindled, source within opposition confirm.

Sources with the knowledge of high-level political wheeling and dealing in the country say the PPP would always be averse to bringing a no-trust motion against the sitting Chairman Senate because it received government support for the Senate seat from Islamabad for Syed Yousaf Raza Gilani on that express condition.

The PML (N) on its part is opposed to bringing a no-confidence motion against the Punjab Chief Minister because of that fears some of its own members may not support any such move.

Also, given the current economic situation

and high commodity prices in the international markets, the PML (N) is unwilling to occupy the treasury benches for the remaining period of present assemblies.

Nor does the PPP have any appetite for this responsibility as any failure to handle the current situation will hurt its prospects for the next elections.

Against this backdrop, it is clear now that the opposition will continue to pursue the policy of protests rallies in different cities in order to continue to inflame the sentiments of the public over sky-high food prices, in the hope of cashing in on popular anger against the government in the next general elections.

The PDM announced countrywide protests at its meeting earlier this month. While a few protest meetings have already been organised, analysts say the opposition will look to keep up its momentum by announcing more protest rallies in the coming days.

Government circles are confident they face no threat from the opposition for now. They are certain the opposition's fresh protest campaign will also fizzle out like the long march by Maulana Fazlur ur Rehman back in 2019.

The real challenge on the hands of the government, then, is the price-hike – which it would do well to tackle sooner rather than later to provide relief to the masses if it has to stand any chance of success in the next general elections.





When Life Gives You a Lemon Orchard, Start a Lemonade Stand

PM Khan must engage the opposition to ensure smooth sailing for the remainder of his tenure.



By Zain Rihat

Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party has been sustained in power from the outset by its coalition partners both in centre and the Punjab province. The junior coalition partners including PML-Q, MQM-P, and others have so far stood by Khan in Islamabad as well as in Lahore despite some reservations they have openly expressed from time to time on different issues.

As the PTI government has already entered its fourth year of 5 years tenure and there is just over one year time left in the next general elections, the opposition parties have decided to accelerate their campaign to oust the incumbent government.

Encouraged by the controversy that emerged at the time of the recent appointment of the ISI director general, the opposition parties hope to capitalize on the rupture between PTI and the establishment. They believe the new ISI DG will not support for the PTI government and this stepping back will translate into problems for the PTI government.

The recent postponement of the joint sitting of the parliament at the last minute strengthened the opposition perception that the government had lost support of its allies. They were further emboldened by the reservations the allied party PML-Q openly expressed on some issues just before the joint sitting of the parliament.

Price-hike and inflation remained another reason that might have made the opposition deem it the right time to launch a decisive movement against the PTI government.

On the other hand, things seem smooth after the new DG ISI has taken charge of the office. This clearly means PTI has overcome the controversy around the appointment of the ISI director general.

The successful strategy employed by the ruling party ensured support of the allies and passage of several bills including the key proposals that allowed use of EVMs and right to vote to overseas Pakistanis in the next general election in the joint sitting of the parliament.

According to the Minister for Information and Broadcasting Chaudhry Fawad Hussain, the allied parties of the government have expressed full confidence in the leadership of Prime Minister Imran Khan and PTI.

Briefing media after a meeting of the members of the government's allied parties with Prime Minister Imran Khan, he said the entire leadership of the allied parties, including GDA, MQM-Pakistan, PML-Q, and Balochistan Awami Party, was present in the meeting and are standing with the government. He said the reservations of the allies were listened to and addressed.

Analysts say the allied parties have no option but to stand by the government. While they may have some reservations, parting ways with the government in the fourth year of the tenure makes no sense. This is the time, rather, to get closer to the government and ask it 'what is for us, for our constituency'.

PML-Q is sharing power with PTI in



Punjab and looks quite comfortable. The hue and cry by the allied party from time to time looks like part of a strategy to gain more and more from the government and for sure they are going nowhere.

Yet the opposition bloc seems determined to go for a final move against the government. Given the opposition bloc's enthusiasm, the PTI government may face major jolts ahead.

The opposition options including street agitation (public meetings, public rallies, etc.) and bringing no-confidence motions.

The opposition can call a vote of no-confidence against the prime minister under Article 95 of the Constitution. Article 95 (4) of the constitution says, "If the resolution is passed by a majority of the total membership of the National Assembly, the Prime Minister shall cease to hold office."

In the first phase, the opposition may move a no-confidence motion against the speaker National Assembly to test the waters.

As the opposition parties have announced to go all out against the PTI, the question arises what options PTI has to defuse the situation. What strategy can the ruling party employ to beat back the potential challenges it has brushed aside as storms in a teacup?

To consolidate its position, the government can first restore the allies' confidence by taking them into confidence on different subjects. Economic front remains another challenge for the government.

The opposition parties have been taking advantage of the price-hike that has directly hit the poor. Last but not least, the government should engage the opposition to defuse the situation and find a smooth way forward.

The government has been successful so far in winning the confidence of the allies. Their support to the key legislation in joint sitting of the parliament manifests they are with the government as they had been since their joining the coalition.

A coalition government is always difficult to run. Different political parties have their own demands under tough circumstances and it is always a challenge to accommo-

date them. Yet the ruling party must engage the allies for a better working relationship and dispel the impression of disarray in the coalition.

The increase in the prices of essential commodities especially, in the PTI tenure has been an unwelcome situation and needs to be dealt with. The government has so far failed to control inflation despite efforts.

The government's inability in dealing with inflation has influenced all and sundry negatively and taken a toll on the ruling party's popularity. Planning Minister Asad Umar is on record saying inflation will not ease till at least the middle of the next year.

Lives of those living below the poverty line have become more difficult these days. Inflation has diminished the purchasing power and the PM must be aware of the adverse results of the continuing situation and its political fallout.

government can find ways for dealing with different opposition tactics and minimize their effectiveness. This will strengthen the government's own position.

Despite PM Imran Khan's reluctance to hold dialogue with the opposition on key national issues, the treasury party must engage the opposition. This will help the government turn any negatives of the opposition into a positive situation. Delicate engagement with the opposition benches alone can help the government develop an understanding with them and win their cooperation.

The opposition has a comprehensive plan of public rallies and protests for the coming days. They seem determined to exploit every avenue which could help them oust the PTI government.

Frustrated PDM Chief Maulana Fazl-ur-Rehman has recently held a



The common man has been at the receiving end of the effects of inflation like never before. No doubt, it is difficult for the government to move forward, especially in the backdrop of the economic crisis. The government has little room to take stringent decisions or implement economic reforms.

Yet the PTI government must take measures to ease the situation for the poor after taking the opposition into confidence on the subject.

Engaging opposition for dialogue is a key in a democratic system. By doing so, the

meeting with PPP chief Bilawal Bhutto Zardari to find ways and means to get rid of the ruling party. PPP had quit the anti-government coalition months back due to differences on some key issues and the recent meeting is being considered as a renewal of the anti-government moves.

Still there is a perception that the opposition bloc has decided to launch their election campaign under the garb of anti-government campaign knowing well that the PTI will be limping its way to the next general elections in 2023.



EVMs to What End?

Do we want to bolster the credibility of our electoral system or undermine it?



By Sarfraz Raja

Credibility no doubt is the essence of electoral process. The most important function of elections is to establish legitimacy of elected representatives in eyes of people of the country. Sceptical, untrusting observers should be able to see the election results are accurate. It is not just sufficient for election results to be accurate but the public must believe its accuracy.

e-Voting and i-Voting

E-voting and i-Voting have remained under discussion for many years in Pakistan and recently a legislation has been passed by parliament for implementation of E & i-Voting.

E-voting which stands for electronic voting system in which specifically designed machine called EVM (electronic voting machine) is used to cast vote by pushing a button on any candidate's name instead of manually stamping the ballot paper and depositing it in a ballot box.

On other hand, i-Voting which stands for internet voting, a voting process designed for voters living in some other part of the world to allow them to be a part of electoral process in their county through internet.

EVMs and legislation

In many of the world's democracies, the issue of EVMs has become a matter of wide spread public debate. No machine ever made is infallible and it follows that like all other machines, electronic voting machines are prone to errors and malfunctioning.

Parliament of Pakistan in its joint sitting on 17 November 2021 passed a bill to amend electoral laws to provide for the use of EVMs and to give the right to overseas Pakistanis to vote through internet from their country of residence.

But the bill, that had already become controversial, became even more controversial after its passage.

The legislative proposal had previously been rejected by the Upper House of Parliament and opposition parties as well as some of government had voiced their concerns.

Equally important, the Election Commission of Pakistan, which is actually the body responsible to implement this piece of legislation, had also published its concerns and forwarded its queries to a parliamentary committee earlier when the draft bill was introduced.

Election Commission's reservations

In its written brief to the parliamentary committee, ECP had raised as many as 34 points of concern including lack of political consensus among stakeholders, use of EVMs in haste without proper and massive testing, and possible breach of secrecy of ballot.

ECP In its brief also mentioned that EVMs would not counter all types of fraud and



could open up the system to more sophisticated type of frauds through manipulation of software and hardware. Also, there will be lack of evidence in case of election disputes.

This system will prove very costly as a nationwide electoral exercise would require about 100,000 polling stations and 400,000 polling booths. If separate machines are used for National and Provincial assembly seats, around 900,000 machines will be required.

Taking into account all expenditures including storage, hiring, training cost, etc., this system will cost approximately PKR 150 billion.

Considering that the average cost of a general election over the history of Pakistan calculates to less than PKR 50 billion, the first election to be conducted using EVMs would cost more than all previous general elections put together.

Storage of 900,000 machines will also be a major challenge as ECP does not have capacity of such massive storage. Using third-party private warehouses carries its own hazards, exposing the machines to potential manipulations.

Finally, there is the question of sustainability: For how many elections can the machines be used before they go obsolete? Training of polling staff and voters and logistics and security of the machines are also among issues that remain to be addressed.

Reservations regarding i-Voting.

To give overseas voters right to vote through internet was a much earlier demand than EVMs and on directions of Supreme Court of Pakistan in April 2018 a task force in its report pinpointed some flaws in i-Voting.

These included secrecy of ballots, vote buying and coercion with voting taking place outside a polling booth, hackers' interference, etc.

ECP piloted i-Voting in 35 by-elections in August 2018 on seats vacated in the wake of the July 2018 general election. Voters were

required to register online through the ECP website to participate in the program, but their response was not much encouraging.

Earlier this year, the government commissioned a special audit of this i-Voting by an International firm through the Ministry of IT. In its findings, the auditor declared that the present internet voting system for overseas Pakistanis did not ensure vote secrecy.

The report said the i-Voting system piloted in 2018 did not fulfil the constitutional requirements of vote secrecy as neither the voters nor the Election Commission had any guarantee that the results obtained from the system represented the choices made by the voters.

Hackers could get results at any time, or decrypt the individual vote of any voter.



A political move?

After these clear reservations from ECP and the glaring loopholes pointed out by the audit, the government's move to push through the legislating without first achieving a broad-based political consensus is inexplicable to say the least.

Observers and analysts are aghast how the government could legislate to institute a law that would undermine rather than strengthen the electoral system in the name of technological advancement.

The softest of among the voices questioning this move say this could be a political move by PTI government to curry favour with expats.

The government spokesmen, however,

declare this move a historic step towards transparency of elections and making electoral process simpler and easier.

Challenges in implementation

After the passage of the new legislation which has already become a controversy, the ball is in the court of ECP. The challenge on the hands of this constitutional institution is to make the new system acceptable for all stakeholders.

Background discussions with ECP officials reveal they find it hard to implement in the near term. In particular, implementing the new system in time for the coming general election is all but impossible.

The sequence of tasks required to be accomplished for the implementation of the new

system is both long and arduous, and could take years even if initiated immediately.

The ECP will first have to acquire EVMs on large scale in a transparent way from a reputable supplier, then train and equip the polling staff, then educate voters, then test these machines on a massive scale in an electoral exercise.

An ECP official who spoke on condition of anonymity said the system could probably be piloted in a few constituencies in 2023, but its complete and flawless implementation in two years' time would be impossible.

On other hand, i-Voting could be implemented as it was done in 2018, but with all its concerns and risks mentioned above.

Khan Ready to Bite the Bullet of IMF Pre-Conditions

Applying the brakes on the economy is always a tough call, even when it is overheating.



By Khalique Ahmad

In political terms, PM Khan's government has agreed to pay a steep price for the revival of IMF's USD 6 billion EFF program: It has agreed to put into effect a series of austerity measures at a time when domestic political realities call for easy money policies.

After over two and half months of negotiations, Pakistan and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) last week reached staff-level agreement on five pre-conditions that form the basis of a 'mini-budget' of over PKR 800 billion to revive USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility under suspension since April this year.

The approval of State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Amendment Act and supplementary budget involving one of the country's steepest fiscal adjustments will enable the IMF to call its executive board meeting early next year.

This returns Pakistan to another stabilization phase albeit with moderate economic growth that would pinch the common population which has braved three years of continuous economic slump; high inflation rates particularly

those of the essential commodities, joblessness and loss of income levels.

According to Prime Minister's Advisor on Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin the economic growth exceeded the government expectations in first four months of the fiscal year owing to expansionary fiscal and monetary policies.

Both the central bank and the government would now tighten up policy as economy had started to overheat and such a high growth rate was unsustainable.

The SBP, he said, had already started mopping up excess money in the market through cash margins and monetary policy etc., to cut back inflation.

IMF's executive board will then clear disbursement of just over USD 1 billion and allow revival of the Fund programme direly needed by Pakistan to sustain inflows from other multilateral lending agencies like the World Bank and Asian Development Bank and bilateral lenders like the Paris Club and the international capital markets in the form of Euro Bonds or Sukuk.

The government has to go for USD 1-1.5 billion international bonds to replace a recent repayment of a matured bond. This should help contain pressure on current account deficit and the exchange rate, increase foreign exchange reserves, and address market uncertainty.

In theory, this is a positive omen for the economy facing expansion in current account deficit and inflationary pressures, especially because it has to be soon followed by about another support package worth USD 4.2 billion from Saudi Arabia.

In practice, however, the government has not been able to realise the Saudi oil facility worth USD 1.2 billion and USD 3 billion in safe deposits formally announced by the Kingdom almost a month ago.

But the steep fiscal adjustment that seeks to withdraw over PKR 350 billion worth of sales tax exemptions on key business items in the remaining six months of the current fiscal year and about PKR 250 billion cut in the budgets of development and key security entities contain salutary negative impact.

At least in the short term, these measures envisage taking steam out of the nascent economic growth. To be precise, these prior actions include withdrawal of PKR 350 billion worth of GST exemptions through supplementary finance bill, PKR 4 per litre increase in petroleum levy every month, autonomy to the SBP, audit of Covid funds and declaration of their beneficial owners, and PKR 200 billion reduction in public sector development programme to PKR 700 billion from the budgeted PKR 900 billion. About PKR 50 billion cut has also been imposed on grants.

The cut in development budget not only affects the planned improvement in living standards of the people but also significantly scales down economic activities and hence the economic growth. Therefore, the IMF estimates Pakistan's growth rate subdued at 4 percent, even though the government still expects it to be around 5 percent.

The revenue target has now been set at PKR 6.1 trillion instead of PKR 5.8 trillion in the original budget 2021-22, said Tarin, adding the FBR had already collected PKR 225 billion above the target in first four months of the fiscal.

On its part, IMF remains unimpressed by the collection and is pressing for implementation of policy actions to remove distortions like varying GST rates for various sectors.

Coupled with this is the psychological impact of the government announcement to increase petroleum levy at the rate of PKR 4 per litre every month till it attains the highest permissible limit of PKR 30 from the current PKR 9.50 to collect at least PKR 356 billion in remaining seven months of the current fiscal year.

The combined impact of all these measures goes beyond PKR 800 billion, the highest ever in a fiscal year on top of significant adjustment at the time of original budget in June. However, given the fact that PKR 610 billion target for petroleum levy was part of the budget and around PKR 254 billion would remain unrecoverable, the net impact of fiscal adjustment through mini-budget would work out at about PKR 550 billion.

No wonder then, the country's stock

market responded to the staff level agreement and related 1.5 percent hike in policy rate by the central bank with almost 1550 points or about 3.4 percent decline in first two days.

This clearly means the investors are worried about the additional taxation impact and end to the fiscal stimulus they have been enjoying since the breakout of Covid-19 in February 2020.

This is despite the fact that the impact of additional petroleum levy may not necessarily lead to higher petroleum prices as international market prices are expected to decline in the coming months. Therefore, there is strong possibility that petroleum prices may actually come down despite increase in tax rates, especially if the rupee can recoup some of its lost value against dollar, creating the space to absorb the impact of higher petroleum levy.



There is, however, no doubt that the mini budget would increase the difficulties of the public. Advisor Finance Shaukat Tarin also conceded that difficulties of the lower income groups would "increase marginally" as a result of IMF conditions but promised targeted subsidies to address their problems.

Mr Tarin said SBP's independence would be ensured and its accountability would be on the pattern of judges and other similar institutions and the central bank would not become an alien institution.

Under the new regime, there will be no Monetary and Fiscal Policy Board where Finance Secretary used to have a say but this has now to be replaced with a liaison between the Finance Minister and the SBP governor.

Also, the government would appoint the governor and the board of directors who would be completely free in monetary policy decisions, exchange rate adjustments and price determination. The governor and the board would have the powers to appoint deputy governors and the Ministry of Finance would have no role in approving foreign visits of deputy governors and other senior officials.

The IMF appreciated the government for policy actions in Covid period and as required under the IMF programme, but warned that external pressures have started to emerge and needed to be addressed.

These include a widening of the current account deficit and depreciation pressures on the exchange rate—mainly reflecting the compound effects of the stronger economic activity, an expansionary macroeconomic policy mix, and higher international commodity prices.

In response, the authorities have started to adjust policies, including by gradually unwinding Covid-related stimulus measures.

The Fund said the policies agreed to by the two sides would safeguard the positive near-term outlook, with growth projected to reach or exceed, 4 percent in FY2022 and 4.5 percent next fiscal.

It warned that the current account deficit was expected to widen this fiscal year despite some export growth, reflecting the rising import demand and international commodity prices. This economic outlook continues to face elevated domestic and external risks, while structural economic challenges persist.

The IMF also suggested that strengthening the medium-term outlook, including by unlocking sustainable and resilient growth, creating jobs, and improving social outcomes, hinged on ambitious efforts to remove structural impediments and facilitate the structural transformation of the economy.

That is where the performance of the government would have to be watched because it would need to burn a lot of political capital closer to the election year.

Why Fanning Public Anger Over Inflation is a Mistake

Do you complain when two and two makes four? The law of supply and demand is likewise immutable.

By Fahad Thaheem

We would all love two and two to make five, six or, even ten – but do you moan and groan when it only makes four? You do not – because you know there is no use of complaining about how mathematics works.

Commodity prices, likewise, follow the law of supply and demand. And although economics is still not an exact science, this may be an area where it approaches mathematical exactitude.

As the Pakistani public groans under the burden of spiraling prices, all concerned should do all they can to alleviate their sufferings – but those who seek to further inflame their feelings are not helping.

At a time when rising prices have smothered the people and there is little hope of betterment in sight, playing politics over price hike adds to the hardship and misery the people are facing now.

The opposition politicians in particular continue to overlook the nature of the problem – and their part in creating it. If they really wanted to help, they would try and rationalise the phenomenon and explain the forces at work under the hood.

During the pandemic, lockdowns brought business operations and international dealings to a standstill, disrupting supply chains worldwide. News from around the world bear witness to the fact that most supply chains are yet to return to their pre-Covid levels.

Basic economic theory suggests that when demand exceeds supply, price inevitably goes up. This is as ironclad as two and two make four there is nothing that can change this.

As authoritarian rulers have discovered time and again, if you try to dictate lower prices, you drive supplies underground and into black-markets, send prices soaring even higher.

Yet, the politically inclined among us are somehow unable to grasp this basic reality –



or maybe they are inflaming public anger on purpose? What dark purpose that would be!

Similarly, a cursory look into international trade and the manner in which it functions is sufficient to address the rising prices as a result of international prices. When we trade, we do so in dollar terms, meaning with falling exchange rate, the price of goods and services automatically rises.

If we take a look at our imports, we are spending big time on essential items like crude oil, diesel, LNP, LPG and less essential items such as chocolate, cheese, mobile phones, etc.

Together, they inflate our import bill so that it far exceeds the proceeds from our exports. This imbalance creates a further need to raise prices because it pushes the dollar higher against the rupee.

These tables are provided to substantiate evidence for the kinds of items exported and the value they hold in comparison to the type of items being imported into the country. While it does not represent the exact values for the current year, they do provide insight into the sorts of items that are both imported and exported with major value being imported rather than exported.

This disparity burdens the government and to collect enough resources for these payments, it predictably shifts the burden to consumers. While the government cannot be absolved of all responsibility for price hike, it will be useful to remember that we as a society are part of the problem here.

Inflation is indeed hitting its all-time high levels and prices are in fact the highest in the region, but equally important is the realization that international prices are at their highest level in the past 20 years.

In such a scenario, the government has little choice beyond foisting the rising costs onto the local consumers. It is easy to bicker and complain about the growing inflation but the onus falls upon us as citizens of the country as well.

The day we begin to spend responsibly and substitute local goods for foreign manufactured goods, import costs will be eliminated and prices will come down. When faced with the choice to choose international over domestic despite the standards, quality and brand name that is registered, the responsibility will continue to be shared aspect between the government and the society.

It is highly important for the local populace to take up this as a national duty and embark upon the mission to try and reduce the import burden as much as they can.

While the citizenry cannot be happy with rising prices especially when they contribute to faltering living standards, we must wake up to our responsibility in this connection.

And if there is any way to alter the direction of this onslaught, it must be embraced immediately – not just to satisfy the electoral demands of the people but for the overall benefit of the entire population.

Economy's Direction Right but Domestic Market Stressed for Now

PSX is bearish on IMF package as it brings policy rate hike and more taxes.



By Javed Mahmood

Domestic markets reacted unfavourably to Pakistan signing a staff level agreement with IMF for resumption of a USD 6 billion bail-out package because it does away with tax subsidies and brings an immediate hike in policy rate.

On 21 November, the IMF announced the signing of a bilateral staff level agreement with Pakistan which should have contained the unbridled flight of dollar and other major currencies, but the expectations of analysts and public bounced back as dollar glittered with more strength in Pakistan.

A day after the deal with the IMF, the dollar-rupee exchange rate once again surged to around PKR 175 in the inter-bank and PKR 177 in the open market operations.

The dollar-rupee parity just showed favour for the Pakistani rupee for a couple of days when Saudi Arabia announced a USD 4 billion package for Pakistan during the recent visit of Prime Minister Imran Khan to Saudi Arabia.

However, two days later the rupee resumed its slide and the dollar bounced back to its previous record high value in the inter-bank and open market.

Similarly, KSE-100 benchmark index has plunged below 45K level in recent days from about 47k level amid growing economic uncertainties in the country. It seems the markets have taken a dim view of the IMF condition to increase in the discount rate.

Analysts say the State Bank of Pakistan decision to raise discount rate by 150 basis points in one go, to 8.75 percent from 7.50 percent, has shocked investors and businessmen in Pakistan and this development has triggered flight of capital from the Pakistan Stock Exchange that was evident from erosion in value of shares and benchmark index of PSX.

Also, Pakistan's current account deficit has increased 400 percent in first four months of the current financial year and during July-October FY22 period, the State Bank of Pakistan has reported USD 5.18 billion current account deficit. In the corresponding period of last fiscal, the current account deficit was around USD 1.21 billion.

Another disturbing development is an alarming increase in the trade deficit of Pakistan which has widened to above USD 15 billion during July-October 2021 period of this fiscal, whereas in the similar period of last fiscal the trade deficit stood at just

USD 7.56 billion.

In other words, the trade deficit has expanded by almost 100 percent, surging over USD 15 billion, from USD 7.54 billion in July-October period in 2020. We can simply say that the trade deficit has wiped out the monetary impact of remittances as well as any foreign loans and assistance inflows Pakistan received during this period.

According to the latest foreign trade data shared by PM's Advisor on commerce and trade Abdul Razzak Dawood, Pakistan has narrowly missed the exports target set for the first four months of this financial year and during July-October period of FY22, exports amounted to USD 9.49 billion against the quarterly target of USD 9.6 billion.

On an average, Pakistan has earned about USD 2.36 billion through exports in a month which was below the expectations. Trade deficit in first four months, nonetheless, surged beyond USD 15 billion as imports expanded to USD 25 billion while exports stood at only USD 9.46 billion during July-October period of this financial year.

Advisor to Prime Minister Razzak Dawood

has admitted that the exports remained below the target in first four months of FY22. In October 2021, the target of exports was also missed as exports increased to USD 2.47 billion, but missed the target of USD 2.6 billion.

However, in first four months the exports grew by 25 percent, mounting to USD 9.468 billion as compared to USD 7.57 billion during July-October 2020. Pakistan's exports in October 2021 grew by 17.5 percent to USD 2.471 billion — the highest ever export recorded in any October 2021.

Another critical problem is that the national imports expanded by 64 percent in first four months of FY22 and increased to USD 25 billion as against to USD 15.2 billion during July-October 2020.

Hence, in US dollars the imports surged by USD 10 billion. About 40 percent of this increase was investment-driven (capital goods, raw material and intermediates) which indicates expansion and enhanced activity by industry.

Inflation

The upward journey of the prices of consumer items continued in October 2021 and inflation inflated to 9.2 per cent from 9 percent in September and 5-7 percent target of the government for FY22. This unwanted increase in inflation was influenced by faster rupee depreciation and rising energy prices last month, according to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics. The PBS stated that inflation measured by the Consumer Price Index (CPI) expanded to its highest level in four months (July-October 2021) — the period when global oil prices kept on rising steadily which undermined the earlier gains. At the same time, prices of fresh vegetables, fruits and meat have also posted a persistent increase in major urban areas. The average inflation during the July-October period rose to 8.74 percent on a yearly basis well above the government's target. Interestingly, the inflation started declining after surging to 11.1 percent in April, mainly driven by a drop in prices of agricultural products, but the trend has reversed now on the back of a rise in prices of petroleum products. In 2020-21, annual CPI inflation was recorded at 8.90 percent against 10.74 percent the preceding year.

Shaukat Tarin, Prime Minister's Advisor on Finance and Revenue said the inflation was a global issue. Pakistan is now importing wheat and sugar, besides pulses, Tarin said, adding that higher prices in the international market would affect domestic prices as well.

Food inflation is still at a higher level as in urban areas it jumped by 9.4 percent in October on a yearly basis and 1.5 percent on a monthly basis, whereas the respective growth in prices in rural areas stood at 7.2 percent and 2.6 percent.

The PBS data shows that in urban areas, many food items saw an increase in their prices in October as compared to the previous month.



Remittances and trade deficit

Surprisingly, in the month of October 2021, the inflows of remittances from overseas Pakistanis fell by 7.4 per cent in comparison with September even though cumulative remittances amounted to USD 10.6 billion during the first four months (July-October) of the financial year 2021-22.

This negative trend in October this year was unexpected and if it continued further, Pakistan would lose a significant amount of foreign exchange which will further trigger rupee depreciation and eliminate foreign exchange reserves of the country.

According to State Bank of Pakistan, the remittances from expatriate Pakistanis have risen to USD 10.6 billion so far in FY22, up 12 percent over the same period last year. Until end-September this year, remittances posted 12.5 percent growth over the comparable period last year, although it slowed down to 12 percent for October.

The central bank further said that in addition to remaining above USD 2 billion

since June 2020, this is the eighth consecutive month when remittances have been close to or above USD 2.5 billion. On a cumulative basis, remittances rose to USD 10.6 billion in the first four months of FY22.

The surging imports during the July-October period have widened the trade deficit, putting significant pressure on the rupee-dollar exchange rate which ultimately reflected in higher current account deficit.

The situation for the economic managers is not comfortable, except the higher remittance supported the economy beyond imagination.

In 2020-21, Pakistan has received record remittances of USD 29.4 billion which

reduced the current account deficit. The central bank reported that remittance inflows during the first four months of FY22 stood highest at USD 2.7 billion from Saudi Arabia, followed by USD 2 billion from the United Arab Emirates, USD 1.5 billion from the United Kingdom, and USD 1.1 billion from the United States.

The SBP claimed credit for the higher remittances, saying proactive policy measures by the government and the bank to incentivise the use of formal channels and altruistic transfers to Pakistan amid the coronavirus pandemic have positively contributed towards a sustained improvement in remittance inflows since last year.

The ongoing trend of USD 5.5 billion current account deficit in just four months of FY22 indicates that at the end of this fiscal Pakistan is likely to face more or less USD 15 billion current account deficit.

Additionally, the trade deficit, which is around USD 15 billion in four months (July-October 2021), is projected to widen to over USD 40 billion.

Can Cryptomining be Pakistan's Billion-Dollar Opportunity?

One million youngsters mining Ethereum can yield USD 1 billion a year in forex.



Cryptocurrency has an enormous growth potential in the years to come. In recent months, the value of Ethereum, the second most important cryptocurrency after Bitcoin, has more than doubled from USD 2,000 in July-August 2021 to USD 4,200 in Nov this year.

At one time, Ether crossed USD 4,800 level but profit taking dragged it back to around USD 4200 price range in the third week of Nov 2021.

Meanwhile, Bitcoin has surged to around USD 60,000 these days, from below USD 39,000 level in July-August because of global crackdown against mining of Bitcoin with coal-based energy. As the thorny issues about Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies have subsided since October, their prices have surged to a record high level in November.

Like Ether, Bitcoin's value also improved near USD 70,000 around mid-Nov, but profit-taking reduced its spike to around USD 60,000 again. In the past few days,

major cryptocurrencies were consolidating their prices, roughly double the levels seen in July/August.

In Pakistan, the PTI government has promised to provide 10 million jobs and a best way to empower youngsters, especially students to become self-employed is to facilitate them to start mining of cryptocurrency with minimum investment.

At present, thousands of young students are already carrying out mining of Ethereum, the most important cryptocurrency after Bitcoin. The mining of Bitcoin is very expensive as it is possible only at commercial level and involves millions of rupees in investment.

However, anybody can start mining Ethereum with less than PKR 200,000 (around USD 1000). At this time, Ether is trading above USD 4,200 level and its mining rate is much better than the time when it was trading around USD 2000 a few months ago.

To start mining Ethereum, all a person needs is a desktop computer with quality graphics card. The most effective graphics card for mining of Ethereum is available in the range of PKR 70,000 to 85,000 these days because of devaluation of rupee and increase import tariffs.

Hooking youngsters

The government can facilitate youngsters especially students to obtain soft loans from banks to buy required desktop computers for mining and other purposes. The PTI government can also offer grants through Ehsaas programme to the youngsters who cannot or would not secure banks loans.

The Truth International (TTI) talked to a few youngsters already engaged in cryptocurrency mining.

"I am earning more or less three dollars a day (in 24 hours cycle) through mining of Ether," said a young student of a university in Islamabad, who requested not to be named.

“I am doing it since 2020 and today I have increased my cryptocurrency portfolio close to one thousand dollars without making any investment. I already had a gaming-computer with high-quality digital graphics card, so I started mining of Ethereum”.

Uninterrupted power supply and always-on internet are essential for mining. “Many of my friends are also mining this cryptocurrency”, said the youngster.

“I am no more a burden for my parents from the day I started mining of cryptocurrency and I am managing my pocket money and buying necessary items from the money that I earn through mining.”

Costs involved

Another miner, a young student, said that desktop computer remains operational constantly for mining and it hardly consumes 100 units of electricity in a month while cost of internet (on shared basis with family members) is also less than PKR 1000 for a.

All you need is a one-time investment of PKR 150,000 to PKR 175,000 is required to buy a system (CPU with quality graphics card, motherboard, high-speed RAM, etc.), he said.

“When Bitcoin and other cryptocurrencies crashed in June-July 2021, we gave up mining as the rate of mining fell to one dollar per day”, he said. “Nonetheless, in recent months, we have resumed full-scale mining of Ethereum and generating crypto points worth 80-90 dollars in a month”.

For a student, this amount is enough for their monthly pocket money.

The winter opening

Consumption of electricity drops around 40 to 50 percent in the country and this is the best time to empower millions of students and unemployed youngsters to make money from mining of digital gold.

Mining process can be initiated from big cities in the country where power outages are minimum and later on, it can be extended to remote areas.

A billion-dollar opportunity

Calculations based on details gathered by TTI reveal that one million crypto-miners can generate up to USD 1 billion a year with average monthly mining income between USD 80-85 million.

This amount will further increase when

more and more youngsters join the cryptocurrency mining in the country.

The need of the hour is for the government to pace up legislation to promote cryptocurrency mining. The more people explore the digital gold, the more foreign exchange will be earned.

By supporting millions of youngsters, the government can also exceed its target of providing employment opportunities to unemployed youth in Pakistan.

What is more, imports of desktop computers, graphic cards, etc., increased sales of electricity and internet services will increase tax and non-tax revenues of the government.

The government is charging 17 percent GST on internet, while multiple taxes are charged on electricity consumption and import of computers and parts.

Mass-scale mining of cryptocurrency is a win-win solution as neither the government nor the miners risk losing anything and instead all the stakeholders will be getting their share of money.

By Javed Mahmood



Will the Planet be Best Left to Gen Z?

Are young people better equipped to manage the dwindling natural resources of the earth?

Desk Report

Young people worldwide are moving to the forefront of activism on issues of vital importance to the future of humanity, be it girls' education (e.g., Malala Yousafzai) or environment (e.g., Greta Thunberg). Now a UK energy company is out to demonstrate how young people can infuse green ideas into business practices if allowed a voice in corporate decision-making.

It appointed a "Good Future Board" of young people to steer the company on a greener path. The six members of the advisory board are aged from 12 to 17.

"We wanted to give a diverse group of young people a voice in the [climate] crisis which will impact them more than older generations", the company's chief executive Nigel Pocklington, has been quoted by BBC as saying. "They give us new ideas and perspectives which we wouldn't get from experienced business executives."

Based out of Chippenham, a market town in northwest Wiltshire, Good Energy positions itself as a green energy company geared towards creating a greener world, and promises, "100 percent renewable electricity and carbon neutral gas".

Aged from 12 to 17, all six members of the board belong to Gen Z – people born between the mid-1990s and the early 2010s, which is now the most-populous generation on Earth.

One report said that members of Generation Z now account for 2.5 billion people, or 32% of the global population. The environment is the biggest concern of members of Gen Z, according to a global survey conducted this year by accountancy group Deloitte.

"There are some astonishing places of natural beauty in the world and I'm scared they will not be around when I'm grown up," 12-year-old Jack Solly, the board's youngest member told Positive News. "I hope that I'll be able to influence Good Energy to make some positive decisions for the climate."

He credits David Attenborough's documentaries for opening his eyes to the devastating effects of the climate crisis and pollution. And, like the veteran naturalist, he wants to inspire people to act to protect the environment.

"Climate change [is] going to affect everybody but it's going to affect people of colour disproportionately, regardless of where they are," says 17-year-old Mahnoor Kamran, who was born in Pakistan and grew up in the Middle East before moving to the UK two years ago.

Positive News says the teenager is an enthusiastic environmental campaigner and she is not afraid to tell the adults where they are going wrong. "It can be hard, it can be daunting, but I think it's important that we correct them ... because if we don't and they make mistakes and they still continue with their lifestyle, it's going to impact them, their children and the future generation."

Another board member is 13-year-old Shaina Shah who counts the likes of Malala Yousafzai and Rosa Parks among her inspirations, but wants to show people that you don't have to be a household name to make a difference.

"I definitely think that if you are confident in what you believe in and if you stick with it, if you present it well, if you speak calmly and confidently, all of these things will help put your point across and help persuade whoever you're trying to persuade," she says.

Akash Thaker, 17, is keen to learn more about the benefits of renewables and use the knowledge he gains to educate others and build networks.

A college student from Leicester, he has worked part-time at a circular economy start up for the last two years, where his work has included educating festival-goers on how to separate their rubbish, helping divert waste from landfill.

"I really applied so that I can make an



impact not only [at Good Energy] as best I can, but also [to] introduce them to people, especially in the local area, who might want more information on renewable energy," he says.

Good Energy says the advisory board has helped it review its diversity and inclusion strategy, and the feedback from these teenagers on its brand and positioning "has played a big part in a new website we are launching soon".

Solly believes young people's priorities are more focused on the future than those of adults. "Adults are more focused on the present, on doing their jobs - will their boss be happy? Will they get their promotion? Rather than thinking ahead and considering the long-term impacts of their actions," he says.

"Younger people don't have so many pressures and stresses, so are free to look into the future."

Kamran concurs. "For us [on the panel], it's not about short-term gains and profit. For young people, it is about our future – who gets to live, and who suffers. I think we will always put the planet over profit in every situation."

Intriguing thoughts those – and while it may not be practical to leave the affairs to the entirely planet to youngsters, it is certainly a good idea to give them more of a voice in how things are done especially concerning the environment.

Into the Wrong Turn

Afghan Taliban's fresh curbs on media and women portend a dark trajectory for the group and a dark fate for the country.



By Ahmed Mukhtar Naqshbandi

Rights groups including Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch are agitated as Taliban's fresh curbs on media and women portend a dark trajectory for the group in-charge of Afghanistan.

While they are eager to secure international recognition for their government, Afghanistan's Taliban appear to be in no mood to make any concessions to the ways of the world, in particular when it comes to their authoritarian and misogynistic tendencies rooted in their narrow interpretation of Islamic Sharia and Afghan values.

On the bright side, there have been reports of the hardline group making some headway towards allowing girls education under their control, but the puritanical group has announced fresh curbs on media and the presence of women in public life.

They are threatening journalists and imposing strict new media guidelines that especially harm women, Human Rights Watch (HRW) has said.

"Taliban intelligence officials have made death threats against journalists who have criticized Taliban officials and have required journalists to submit all reports for approval before publication", says the New York-based rights group said.

"New guidelines from the Vice and Virtue Ministry dictate the dress of female journalists on television and prohibit soap operas and entertainment programs featuring female actors."

A decree from the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice has made the hijab – a head covering exposing the face – compulsory for women television journalists.

According to HRW, several journalists said that they have been summoned by local officials immediately after publishing reports on Taliban abuses.

One journalist who had reported complaints about Taliban searching houses and beating people said that the

deputy governor called him into his office and told him that if he broadcast anything like that again, "He would hang me in the town square."

Other media staff have reported that heavily armed Taliban intelligence officials visited their offices and warned journalists not to use the word "Taliban" in their reporting but to refer to the "Islamic Emirate" in all publications.

In one province, intelligence officials ordered local media to replace the word for suicide bomber with the word for martyr after a published report mentioned that Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani had honored the families of suicide bombers.

In a directive issued November 21, 2021, the Taliban's Ministry for the Promotion of Virtue and Prevention of Vice prohibited broadcasting any films deemed to be "against Islamic or Afghan values," along with soap operas and dramas featuring women actors.

Editors and journalists have complained about the restrictive climate for the media.

The chief editor for a provincial media outlet said that most of his colleagues had stopped working for their safety. “Access to information has become very limited,” he said. “Taliban local officials have instructed us to share our reports with them before publication.”

The Taliban have also pressed the media, especially in the provinces, to publish the reports they want and have ordered journalists in some instances to interview them.

One journalist said: “After they threatened us with death, we published what they said. Now we broadcast Quranic verses at the beginning of the programs and naat [Islamic songs] because we fear for our safety.”

Many media outlets have closed their offices out of fear and are publishing only online. The chief editor for a women-led media office said that her staff use pseudonyms to hide their identities because the Taliban accuse them “of promoting Western values.”

“I used to produce reports on virginity testing and violence against women, which no one can cover anymore,” said a woman who had been a journalist in Herat. “No program covers women’s issues, especially on TV channels. The educational and entertainment programs have all stopped.”

The atmosphere of fear has left people afraid to share information on incidents, such as forced evictions or violent attacks by the Taliban. Journalists said that the Taliban authorities routinely ignore their requests for information, or simply deny reported incidents.

“The Taliban’s new media regulations and threats against journalists reflect broader efforts to silence all criticism of Taliban rule,” said Patricia Gossman, associate Asia director at Human Rights Watch. “The disappearance of any space for dissent and worsening restrictions for women in the media and arts is devastating.”

“Despite the Taliban’s promises to allow media that ‘respected Islamic values’ to function, the reality for Afghanistan is that journalists live in fear of a knock on the door or a summons from the authorities,” Gossman said. “This is contributing to an

information blackout in which Taliban abuses increasingly happen in secret and without accountability.”

As was the case under the Ghani administration as well, the curbs applicable to media hit local Afghan journalists the hardest.

“The flow of news out of Afghanistan is dwindling, but that does not mean there are no developments to report”, journalist and Afghanistan expert Syed Fakhar Kakakhel told The Truth International (TTI).

The real reason for this phenomenon was the Taliban’s strong-arm tactics to threaten local journalists into silence, he said.



Separately, Amnesty International has said the international community must stand by its long-term commitment to support women’s rights in Afghanistan.

The appeal came ahead of a new campaign by the activist group highlighting the achievements of 16 remarkable Afghan women.

The 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence is an annual international campaign celebrating women in every region of the world who fight gender-based discrimination and stand up for women’s rights.

The campaign starts on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women on 25 November and runs until Human Rights Day on 10 December. It provides a platform for individuals and organizations around the world to call for the prevention and elimination of violence against women and girls.

As part of this year’s campaign, the human rights organization is sharing the stories of 16 trailblazing Afghan women who had overcome huge barriers to participation across public life over the past two decades.

In their own words, women from diverse public spheres including law, politics, academia, and the media recount their professional paths, their feelings about the Taliban’s return, their hopes and fears for the future, and their recommendations to the international community on how to continue supporting women’s rights.

“These stories offer a powerful and timely reminder of just how far Afghan women had come over the past twenty years, in the

face of seemingly insurmountable obstacles,” said Samira Hamidi, Amnesty International’s South Asia Campaigner. “They also provide a sobering insight into how life has transformed for women and girls since the Taliban’s return.”

Hamidi said it was astonishing how these women and thousands more like them were being barred from public life – at a time when the country was facing an economic and humanitarian crisis.

“We urge the Taliban to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of women and girls”, she said. “We call on the international community to engage directly with Afghan women to understand their reality, listen to their pragmatic recommendations, and work with them to support women’s rights.”

Will There Ever be a Reckoning for War Crimes in Afghanistan?

All parties to the decades long conflict in Afghanistan have been accused of atrocities against civilians.



TTI Report

A British judicial review claim has raised hopes of justice for some of the victims of alleged war crimes in Afghanistan, but the overall situation remains hopeless after more than four decades of conflict.

Afghanistan and its people have been at the receiving end of violence from an array of military forces since 1979, when the Soviet invasion of the country began.

The Taliban – the de facto rulers of today’s Afghanistan – have probably been accused of more war crimes than any other party, but they are by no means the only ones to attract such accusations. Every party to each of the several phases of the Afghan conflict has been accused of war crimes and atrocities against civilians.

War crimes are those violations of the law of conflict that incur individual criminal responsibility under international law.

The 1945 Charter of the International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg defined

war crimes as “violations of the laws or customs of war,” including murder, ill-treatment, or deportation of civilians in occupied territory.

Also within the scope of this definition fall murder or ill-treatment of prisoners of war; killing of hostages; plunder of public or private property; wanton destruction of municipalities; and devastation not militarily necessary (Special Air Service).

SAS in the dock

Mr Justice Swift of the high court heard in a mid-November hearing that British military and Ministry of Defence were aware of a series of alleged massacres of at least 33 Afghan civilians by SAS soldiers – but they failed to properly investigate the matter.

All the victims – killed at the peak of the conflict about a decade ago – were fighting age males.

The claim is being made by Richard Hermer QC on behalf of Saifullah, four of

whose male relatives were killed in a night raid by British special forces. His team has raised a series of questions about whether the British military had covered up the matter.

According to the Guardian, Saifullah’s father, two brothers and a cousin were killed in an SAS raid on a compound in Helmand, southern Afghanistan in February 2011. The soldiers said they acted in self defence against men who carried assault rifles and grenades, but the family deny they possessed the weapons.

The case follows a 2019 investigation by BBC Panorama and the Sunday Times that raised allegations of unlawful killings by SAS soldiers in Afghanistan.

The court will consider if the MoD broke human rights law in failing to commence a prompt investigation into the killings of the Saifullah’s family members – and whether it failed to investigate “systemic issues” to rule out there was a pattern of battlefield executions.

Documents presented in court reveal senior military officers raising concerns about the way the SAS was operating even before the killing of Saifullah's family members. Some British officers found it implausible the Afghans shot and killed in the raids would go to their homes after surrendering and return with weapons as stated.

Two officers discussed the killings of Saifullah's family members under the heading "EJK" (extrajudicial killings). They express astonishment those involved were not facing scrutiny, and one of them called it "bollocks".

After further deadly incidents in the following weeks, another officer set down their concerns in a statement written in March 2011: "During these operations it was said that all fighting age males [including those not holding weapons] are killed on target regardless of the threat they posed."

The court documents show the allegations were raised with a "very senior officer" at UK Special Forces headquarters, but the special forces leadership did not notify the Royal Military Police (RMP).

These conscientious efforts seem to have prompted a short internal military review of 11 separate incidents in April 2011. Officers recommended that service police investigate.

Service police but it spent only a week on the ground examining 11 raids where the special forces had killed people in similar circumstances in the previous six months. It has since been accused of "uncritically accepting" accounts provided by those involved.

According to a BBC report, "The final report was written by the commanding officer of the special forces unit accused of carrying out the executions. He accepted the version of events given in the official accounts of the raids."

Eventually, the RMP opened an investigation into alleged civilian executions in 2014 after receiving reports from Afghan families and whistle-blowers from within the British military.

But the investigation, called Operation Northmoor, was closed in 2019 without resulting in any prosecutions as according to the MoD, it turned up "no evidence of

criminal behaviour by the armed forces in Afghanistan".

But the documents presented in court show there were serious weaknesses in the investigation.

Operation Northmoor only investigated three of the original 11 incidents in detail. Two senior officers identified as suspects were dropped without being interviewed, and a decision was taken not to view video footage of special forces raids.

Saufullah's lawyers want Mr Justice Swift to order the MoD to release further official documents. But the ministry of defence seem to be digging their heels, claiming defence secretary Ben Wallace had adopted "a duty of candour" and had already released 1,800 pages of material.



In UK public law, the duty of candour is the duty imposed on a public authority "not to seek to win [a] litigation at all costs but to assist the court in reaching the correct result and thereby to improve standards in public administration".

Acting for the minister, Lisa Giovannetti QC said, "This is not a public inquiry and there is not a duty to provide any document that might look embarrassing".

This is not the first time British forces in Afghanistan have been accused of war crimes. In 2013, Royal Marine Sergeant Alexander Blackman was convicted by a court martial of the murder of an Afghan fighter in Helmand Province.

The victim was reportedly wounded and unarmed when he was murdered by Blackman in September 2011, who was sentenced to life behind bars and dismissed with disgrace from the Royal Marines.

Taliban and Northern Alliance war crimes

Afghan partisans of the conflict have also been accused of war crimes in the country.

The Taliban have been accused of extrajudicial killings of civilians during their first stint in power, systematic killings of civilians and wartime sexual violence as insurgents in the 2010s, and executions of civilians and other atrocities during their 2021 offensive.

Summary executions and targeted killings of civilians by Taliban have been reported in several parts of Afghanistan since the armed group took control of the country in 2012.

The Northern Alliance forces have been accused of massacring between 250 and 3,000 Taliban fighters who had surrendered in December 2001, in what has been called the Dasht-i-Leili massacre.

While most of the victims were shot to death, many of them reportedly died by suffocation or exposure to excessive heat after they were locked in metal truck containers intentionally left in the sun for an extended period of time.

The Guardian and others have reported place US ground troops were present at the scene of the Dasht-i-Leili massacre. The Irish documentary *Afghan Massacre: The Convoy of Death* investigated these allegations and claimed that mass graves of thousands of victims were found by UN investigators and that the US blocked investigations into the incident.

In July 2009, The New York Times reported the Bush administration had “discouraged separate probes by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the State Department and the Pentagon into [mass killing of up to 2,000 Taliban prisoners] because it was conducted by the forces of General Abdul Rashid Dostam, a warlord then on the Central Intelligence Agency's payroll”.

Dostam's militia was part of the Northern Alliance which had worked closely with US Special Forces during the US-led invasion of Afghanistan, helping overthrow the Taliban.

NATO/ISAF war crimes

Many more war crimes allegations have been reported against US-led international forces in Afghanistan, some of which have been investigated and perpetrators brought to book.

On 21 June 2003, CIA contractor and former United States Army Ranger David Passaro killed Abdul Wali, a prisoner at a US base in Kunar Province. He was found guilty and sentenced to 8 years and 4 months in prison on 10 August 2009.

In 2002, US armed forces personnel at the Bagram Theater Internment Facility tortured and later killed two unarmed Afghan civilian prisoners Habibullah and Dilawar. Military coroners ruled both the prisoners' deaths as homicides. Fifteen soldiers were charged.

In 2010 summer fighting season, ISAF charged five United States Army soldiers with the murder of three Afghan civilians in Kandahar and collecting their body parts as trophies. In addition, seven soldiers were charged with other crimes including impeding investigation and attacking the whistle-blower, Specialist Justin Stoner. Eleven of the twelve soldiers were convicted on various counts.

In 2017, Australian whistle-blower David McBride leaked classified documents to journalists that brought to light multiple cases of unlawful killings of unarmed civilians.

The journalists, associated with the ABC network, used the documents to produce a series called *The Afghan Files* that led to what became known as the *Afghanistan Inquiry*.

The Inspector-General of the Australian Defence Force publicly published a redacted version of the Inquiry, otherwise known as the *Brereton Report*, in November 2020, detailing misconduct by Australian troops in Afghanistan.

It found evidence of 39 unlawful killings by Australian forces, including the murder of non-combatants and execution of prisoners, resulting in the disbandment of an SAS squadron and initiation of a police investigation.

ICC

In March 2020, The International Criminal Court announced an investigation into alleged war crimes by the Afghan forces, the US troops, CIA operatives and the Taliban and affiliated armed groups.

The investigation that was authorised to proceed after more than two years of legal wrangling, “drew a swift US rebuke, while the West-backed Kabul administration showed little sincerity in pursuing the cases”, according to Aljazeera.



The United States is not a party to the ICC and maintains its nationals are not bound by its jurisdiction. In September 2020, the Trump administration exerted pressure on the ICC to drop the inquiry against its military by imposing sanctions against Public Prosecutor Fatou Bensouda, who was investigating the allegations.

Activist groups including the British charity Reprieve have submitted representations on behalf of Afghans claiming to have been tortured by the CIA in the infamous

Bagram prison or of relatives of civilians allegedly killed in US drone attacks.

President Joe Biden lifted the sanctions earlier this year, but US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said the US continued to disagree strongly with the ICC's “efforts to assert jurisdiction” over personnel of states not party to its charter – such as the United States and Israel.

In any case, the investigation is effectively on a hiatus since the Taliban's turn to power in Afghanistan this August. In early October, the court requested the secretary-general of the United Nations to submit information on the identification of the authorities currently representing the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan.

The ICC may only assert jurisdiction when the state in which the crimes took place is unwilling or unable to carry out genuine proceedings. States have the right to request for deferral and submit evidence that they are effectively investigating the alleged crimes.

The erstwhile Ashraf Ghani government had requested a deferral shortly after the office of the prosecutor launched the investigation in March 2020. It then submitted documents related to more than 150 cases as evidence that the Afghan justice system was robustly investigating and prosecuting war crimes.

But Human Rights Watch (HRW) accused the Afghan government of failing to bring the perpetrators of war crimes to justice.

With the international community withholding diplomatic recognition of the Taliban regime, it is far from clear how the UN can accept them as the representative government of the people of Afghanistan – and if it does, what view the Taliban will take of the matter, given how their own hands are tainted with atrocities against civilians.

If and when it does go through, the investigation “will take years and some perpetrators are likely to try to flout an ICC indictment if or when it comes”, according to Aljazeera's Federica Marsi.

What is clear at this point is that for Afghan victims of war crimes, the road to justice promises to be long and arduous.



MATRACON PAKISTAN PVT.LTD

BUILDING WITH TRUST

SINCE 1985



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



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



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

LUX STYLE AWARDS 2021

To celebrate entertainers in Pakistan, the Lux Style Awards were introduced in 2002. The award ceremony is dedicated to various forms of entertainment like television, cinema, fashion, film industry, and music. The award ceremonies are usually held in Karachi, but in the past few years, they have been held in Lahore, Dubai, and even Kuala Lumpur.

Naheed Chowdhry, chief executive of Unilever Lux Team in 2002 was the one who incepted the idea to hold the Lux Style Awards for the first time. She collaborated with Frieha Altaf, a TV and event producer, and model, to make this event a reality.

“I wanted to ensure that there was a sustainable legacy created that impartially assessed contributors and gave back to society through scholarships in the arts and culture arena,” says Chowdhry. “One that would go on to be recognized as the ‘Oscars’ of Pakistan.”

The first award ceremony was held in Karachi at the Naval Base. It continued for seven days and consisted of multiple exhibitions and fashion shows at different venues throughout the city. The award ceremony in 2002 was the only one to be extended over seven days. After that, the event was condensed to three days.

To date, 20 Lux Style Awards have been organized, with the last one being held in Karachi. Some of the award winners are as follows:

1. Ehd-e-Wafa, Best TV Serial
2. Umera Ahmed, Best TV Writer
3. Teri Tasveer by Bayaan, Song of the Year
4. Yumna Zaidi, Best TV Actress (Critics Choice)
5. Bilal Abbas Khan, Best TV Actor (Critics Choice)
6. Generation, Best Fashion Design (Pret)





Can Pakistan Lead a Multilateral Initiative to Avert Catastrophe in Afghanistan?

Pakistan's responsibility in Afghanistan is commensurate to its clout and interests in the country – unmatched by any other regional or global player.



Desk Report

Warnings of a looming humanitarian disaster in Afghanistan by multilateral aid organisations and philanthropic groups are growing frenetic, and time is fast running out with bitter Afghan winter almost upon us.

United Nations officials on the ground in Afghanistan paint a grim picture of the humanitarian situation in the country, which is preventable because it is largely due to financial sanctions put in place since the Taliban's rise to power and have paralysed the economy.

According to a recent United Nations report, almost one in two Afghans face crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity. With the winter approaching, up to 23 million Afghans will be in crisis or emergency levels of food insecurity, and the situation will worsen over the winter.

Although the risk of famine was once restricted to rural areas, 10 out of 11 of

Afghanistan's most densely populated urban areas are now anticipated to be at emergency levels of food insecurity.

Against this backdrop, panellists at a high-brow virtual conclave have urged Pakistan to rise to the occasion by playing a leadership role to avert the impending catastrophe.

They said Pakistan must play an outsize role to help alleviate the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan because no other country can match its knowledge of and clout in its war ravaged western neighbour.

Hosted by The Centre for Afghanistan, Middle East & Africa (CAMEA) at the Institute of Strategic Studies (ISSI) in collaboration with the UK-based Middle East Monitor (MEMO), the mid-November webinar was titled "Conversations on Afghanistan: Middle East's Perspectives".

It brought together a constellation of distin-

guished scholars and veteran diplomats including Ambassador Ali Awadh Asseri of Saudi Arabia; MEMO Director Dr Daud Abdullah; and independent political analysts and Afghanistan experts Mr Hashmat Moslih and Mr Ahmad Shah Durrani.

Ambassador Asseri regretted that Afghanistan had suffered tremendously during the past two decades, and contended the war-ravaged country should not be left alone at this critical juncture.

His sentiments were echoed days later by Deborah Lyons, the Secretary-General's Special Representative for Afghanistan, who told a UN Security Council session, "To abandon the Afghan people now would be a historic mistake — a mistake that has been made before with tragic consequences".

Lyons, who also heads the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan

(UNAMA), said the Taliban takeover had left the Afghan people feeling abandoned, forgotten and punished by circumstances that are not their fault.

The veteran Saudi diplomat said since Pakistan had the potential to play such an instrumental role, it should convene a conference on Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia would happily take part.

De facto rulers of Afghanistan, the Taliban are willing to have a United Nations presence in the country for humanitarian relief and development work. They are eager to overcome the trust deficit between them and the international community as a stepping stone to gaining diplomatic recognition.

UN officials have said Taliban continue to provide security to the United Nations presence and allow broad humanitarian access, including for female humanitarian workers.

In an acknowledgement of the improving security situation, UNAMA officials have said their personnel are now able to visit parts of the country they had not accessed in 15 years.

There are, however, contentious matters over which the Taliban are less forthcoming. These include women's rights, girls' education, and reports of harassment and extrajudicial killings in the country.

The Taliban say they are committed to the protection of women's rights within Islamic law, and that they are working on a nationwide policy on the right to girls' education.

However, there has been a general curtailment of Afghan women and girls' fundamental rights and freedoms, ranging from limiting their right to work to the absence of women from major decision-making fora and from senior echelons of the civil service.

The international community continues to press for a more inclusive administration, without much success. Even after the much anticipated expansion of the interim Taliban cabinet announced on 22 November, its composition remains entirely male, essentially Pashtun, and almost all Taliban.

This means a continuation of the impasse between the Taliban and the international

community over diplomatic recognition of their government and lifting of sanctions – which could pave the way for resuscitating the moribund Afghan economy.

Hence the need for an outside-the-box initiative to break the deadlock and create conditions conducive to renewed economic activity, which is the ultimate hope of relieving the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan.

The need for such an initiative is especially urgent as widespread and continued hardship could turn Afghanistan into a terrorist safe haven all over again, as Ambassador Asseri and Afghanistan expert Hashmat Moslih told the conclave.



“We should be aware of another force on the horizon”, said Moslih. “Which is the Islamic State who want the Taliban as well the model of nation state to fail.”

A senior diplomat who has served as Saudi envoy to Pakistan and Lebanon, Ambassador Asseri is the author of “Combating Terrorism: Saudi Arabia's Role in the War on Terror”. Another panellist, Mr Ahmad Shah Durrani, is the author of “An Outside the Box Look at Afghanistan: New Ideas for Lasting Peace and Stability”.

Moslih emphasised that the influence Pakistan had over the Taliban was very limited, especially because of the sanctions regime: There is not much economic activity between the two sides, the Taliban could close down the borders at the slightest provocation.

Dr Daud Abdullah stressed that security and stability of Afghanistan was intertwined with security and stability of the Middle East, and dwelt at some length on the question of refugees and the immense social tensions and aggravations it creates.

He asserted that if Afghanistan was to successfully overcome its current challeng-

es, a lot would depend on the Middle Eastern countries and on Afghanistan itself. Its failure, on the other hand, will have consequences for every country in the region, especially Pakistan.

The UN also recognises that fact that the continuing deterioration of the economy threatens to heighten the risk of extremism in Afghanistan and in the region, and that the paralysis of the banking sector could push more of the financial system into unregulated informal money exchanges, which could in turn facilitate terrorism, trafficking and drug smuggling.

UNAMA is delivering significant amounts of humanitarian aid but says humanitarian

assistance is not enough. The international community needs to urgently find a way to provide financial support to health-care workers in state-run hospitals, staff in food security programmes, and eventually to teachers.

The United Nations will make every effort to ensure these funds are not diverted to the Taliban for their own use. It has created an independent facility for the payment of salaries in the health sector, but says this needs to be expanded to other essential services.

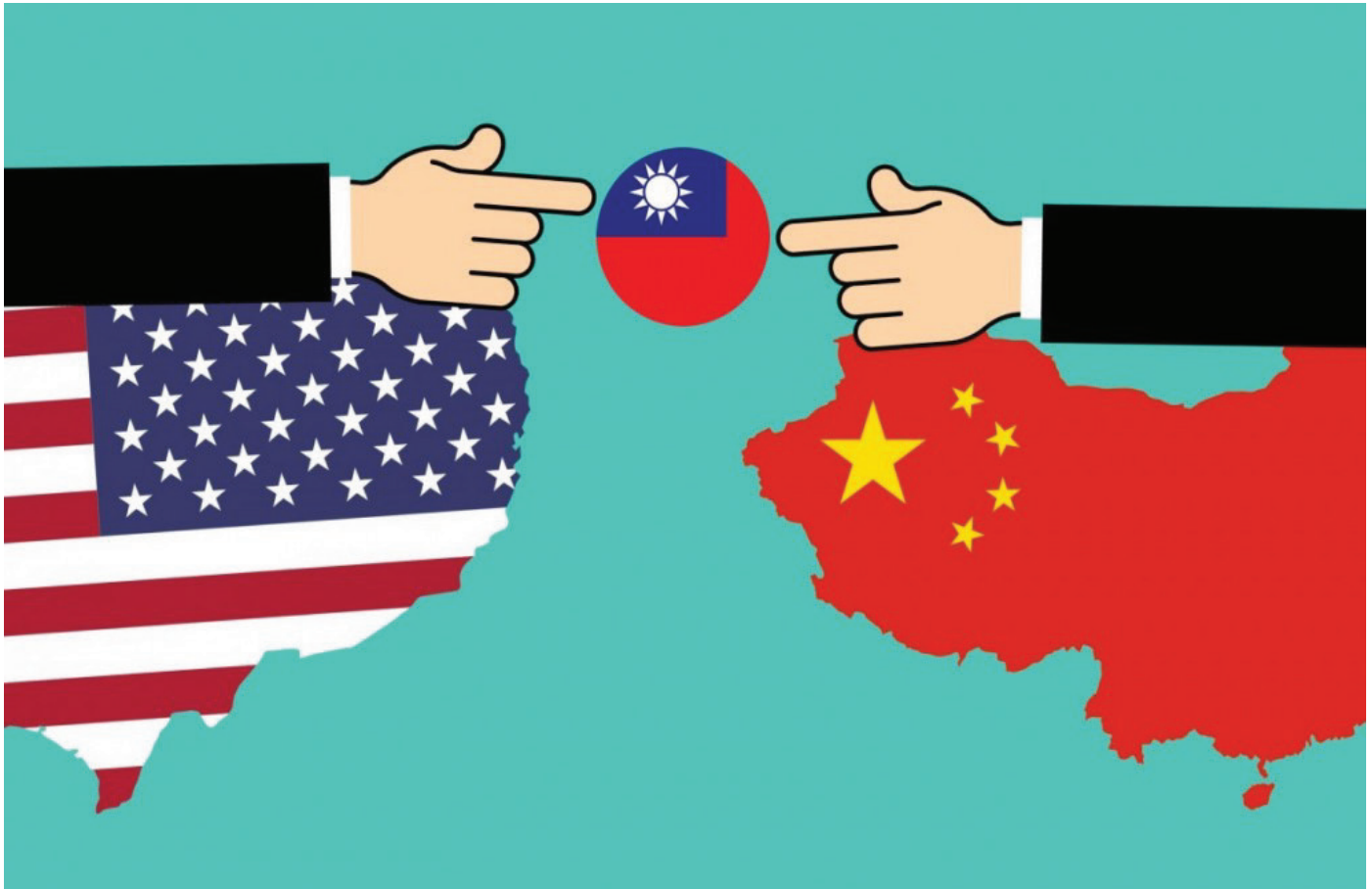
Several panellists accentuated the need to “recognise the ground reality in Afghanistan and work with it”, although none was able to outline the contours of a plan of action to achieve that.

None of the regional countries including Pakistan has accorded diplomatic recognition on the Taliban.

The conclave was unanimous in accentuating that time was of the essence, and urged the authorities in Pakistan to lead the way with a solution bringing together all Middle Eastern countries in a collective effort to quickly defuse the ticking time bomb.

Is a New Cold War Inevitable?

There is no dearth of theories and actors pointing towards a looming US-China conflict, but is there no otherwise?



By Umer Farooq

Even though the Biden Administration does not agree with the characterization of US-China relations as a new Cold War, there is a roaring debate going on in Washington DC on surrounding question whether the world is about to witness the commencement of a new Cold War pitting the declining power (United States) against the rising power (China).

US Administration officials concede that China has been emerging as a broader strategic adversary than the Soviet Union ever was – it is a technological threat, military threat, and an economic rival.

But at the same time, China and the United States have been cooperating in many fields like they recently did in combating the Covid-19 pandemic, and they might again cooperate in meeting the challenge of climatic change.

There are clear signs that China-US relations are not reverting the patterns of international politics back to Cold War structures that existed between the Soviet Union and United States in the post-WWII period.

At that time, not only were government-to-government relations that were cut off but relations between the societies were also relegated to minimal levels.

Consider this example: The year the Berlin Wall fell in 1989, the United States exported USD 4.3 billion in goods to the Soviets and imported USD 709 million, an inconsequential blip for both economies.

Compare this with the depth of relations that exist between Chinese and American societies during the worst of times. The United States exported USD 124 billion in goods to China last year and imported USD 434 billion.

That made China the largest supplier of goods to the United States, and the third largest consumer of its exports, after Canada and Mexico.

While addressing the United Nations General Assembly last month, President Joe Biden opened his mind to the world when he said, “We are not seeking a new Cold War or a world divided into rigid blocs”.

However, this year he has repeatedly referred to a generational struggle between “autocracy and democracy”, conjuring for some the ideological edge of the '50s and '60s that can equally be applied to China-US relations.

Clearly emerging on the horizon are signs of both sides – Washington and Beijing – perceiving simpler military developments as cosmic threats in a global struggle for power, a clear indication that both sides are

entering Cold War modes.

Consider for example how Washington perceived as threatening the Chinese Air Force running sorties inside Taiwan's air identification zone; and how Beijing expanded its space program, boosting three more astronauts to its space station and accelerating its tests of hypersonic missiles meant to defeat American missile defences.

In normal times these could be understood as simple military developments of technological requirements of the opponents. But no one in Washington is ready to perceive these as simple events. American media, at least, was not ready to accept these are simple events and happening.

On the other hand the US announced it would provide nuclear submarine technology to Australia, with the prospect that its subs could pop up, undetected, along the Chinese coast.

It was not lost on Chinese commentators that the last time the United States shared that kind of technology was in 1958, when Britain adopted naval reactors as part of the effort to counter Russia's expanding nuclear arsenals.

Biden Administration officials, nevertheless, are not ready to describe the present situation as commencement of a new Cold War. At any rate, from American media reporting of current events suggest Biden Administration is uneasy with the attempts to describe these developments as beginning of new Cold War.

"For all this, Mr Biden's top aides say that the old Cold War is the wrong way to frame what is happening – and that the use of the term can become a self-fulfilling prophecy", The New York Times' David Sanger write recently.

"Instead, they argue that it should be possible for the two superpowers to compartmentalize, cooperating on the climate and containing North Korea's arsenal, even while competing on technology and trade, or jousting for advantage in the South China Sea and around Taiwan".

In this context, the virtual summit meeting between President Biden and President Xi Jinping could be described as an event that would go a long way in minimizing the chances of tension between the two

countries converting into open conflict.

The meeting itself did not produce any breakthrough. The two leaders and their respective aides even failed to produce a joint statement.

The last summit meeting between former President Trump and President Xi concluded with a joint statement even when the meeting itself generated a lot of tensions.

In the latest meeting, the two leaders sought to keep the many disputes between the two countries from escalating into a broader conflict. If they can translate their words into a kind of détente, it would count as a diplomatic success.

"It seems clear to me we need to establish some common-sense guardrails," Mr Biden told Mr Xi in opening remarks, speaking over what amounted to the equivalent of a Zoom call from the Roosevelt Room at the White House and the East Hall in the Great Hall of the People in Beijing.



Mr Xi, for his part, called Mr Biden "my old friend" and used a nautical metaphor, comparing the two countries to ships that must together navigate the ocean's wind and waves without colliding.

Mr Biden raised concerns about human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong, and about China's "unfair trade and economic policies" harming American workers, the White House statement said.

Mr Xi, according to China's own readout, said that American support for Taiwan was "playing with fire," and explicitly warned

that the world risked slipping back into the superpower confrontations of a half-century ago.

"Engaging in ideological demarcation, camp division, group confrontation, will inevitably bring disaster to the world," Mr Xi said, a clear reference to a pillar of the new US administration's strategy for challenging China by teaming up with like-minded nations that fear China or oppose its authoritarian model. "The consequences of the Cold War are not far away."

Many of the experts of international politics have often expressed the opinion that the conflict between the United States and China is inevitable. This they describe as Thucydides' Trap.

Popularized by American political scientist Graham T Allison, the term Thucydides' Trap describes the apparent inevitability of war when an emerging power threatens to displace an existing great power as a regional or international hegemon.

There is an element of determinism to this paradigm. It denies any role to human agency. In other words, conflict between the two types of power is inevitable and there is nothing that humans or leadership can do to change the course of history.

Also, while Presidents Biden and Xi are apparently determined to avoid conflict, there are other actors and interests that would very much like to see the two great powers locked in a confrontational struggle. Time alone will tell how things play out in reality.

China's Principled Position on Syria

Reconstruction, rehabilitation, and revival are key to Syria's future.

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Ten years of war, instability, and conflict have resulted in nothing but widespread destruction, a lingering humanitarian crisis, and a dilapidated infrastructure in Syria. The failure to mitigate the crisis by policymakers who have been either fixated on regime change or the use of force has not resulted in economic respite for millions of Syrians who have either been internally displaced or become refugees.

Israel has launched missile attacks near Damascus for the second time in early November, which has only compounded its current predicament. The truth is that only through concerted and apolitical reconstruction efforts can Damascus be truly resurrected and a telephonic conversation between Chinese President Xi Jinping and Syrian President Bashar Al Assad points exactly in that direction.

The conversation in early November 2021 resulted in a pledge by the Chinese leadership to support Syria's reconstruction efforts and establish multifaceted cooperation in fields such as security towards alleviating the suffering and struggles of the war-weary population.

This understanding was made possible due to a strong, all-weather, 65-year bilateral relationship that hinges on Damascus being one of the architects of the UNGA resolution to secure China's seat at the United Nations.

The pledge has been made in the absence of political power play with a stern admonition from China of any attempt by external forces to interfere in domestic Syrian affairs. This is a critical variable given that the unconditional infrastructure development in the absence of internal meddling is the only suitable formula for Syria.

The war that started in 2011 has continued unabated with the proliferation of transnational terrorism made possible in the absence of a peaceful resolution. The country has also confronted deeply entrenched proxy warfare with diverse groups such as the Al Nusra Front and

Tahir Al Sham gaining a stronghold in the absence of national cohesion.

It is now clear foreign intervention and attempts to substitute the Al Assad regime with alternate arrangements as has been the case in Iraq has not ushered in economic development but hampered it. There remains no doubt that international justice and protection of Syrian sovereignty will always be a prerequisite instead of a substitute for peace and stability.

In light of this, Damascus's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative is critical for its infrastructural development given that it is not contingent upon domestic political dynamics but partaking in an arrangement that promises sustainable growth instead.

Based on the effects of the war alone, it is clear that the revival of domestic infrastructure as well as regional connectivity projects is the key given that Syria is now the source of the largest displacement in the world with millions of refugees heading towards neighboring Arab states and Europe.

Even low-level conflicts between insurgent groups and the Assad regime in the border regions have resulted in rampant instability. The refugee exodus coupled with terrorism from ISIL has resulted in issues like rampant unemployment, dropping income levels, and eroding export capacity.

The answer, therefore, is swift reconstruction of war zones. President Bashar Al Assad appreciates Chinese companies investing within the country to offset economic difficulties which coincide with President Xi's resolve to enhance cooperation with Syria to combat terrorism and the pandemic.

The combination of reconstruction and rehabilitation is the key to mitigating Syria's economic predicament and securing a brighter future for the country's beleaguered population.

Exogenous variables contributing to the current predicament also include unilateral



sanctions on the Bashar Al Assad regime as well as a destabilising economic blockade stifling Syria's economic resurgence.

In addition, the COVID-19 pandemic in a conflict torn zone with little access to basic amenities has compounded economic woes of the masses.

A recommitment to common values of humanity, empathy, and solidarity as mentioned by President Xi Jinping with a people-centric approach is critical to ensuring that the bilateral relationship between China and Syria results in tangible gains for the domestic population which has eluded them for ten years.

History is replete with examples where foreign interventions in conflict zones has resulted in utter chaos and anarchy while further plummeting economic growth and compromising the potential of developing countries to progress. Hence, defending the territorial sovereignty of Syria is as important as devising economic policies aimed at stimulating domestic growth.

Rebuilding state institutions and providing an investor friendly climate in the absence of political meddling is the key to averting an economic meltdown in Syria. The resolve expressed by China and endorsed by the Al Assad regime is precisely what is needed to kick-start a process in that direction.

Did the Abraham Accords Leave Palestinians in the Lurch?

Arab-Israeli reconciliation is all well and good, but is its cost to Palestinians too steep?



By Momina Ashraf

Several Middle Eastern countries have recently moved towards a rapprochement with Israel – something many see as a positive development, but there are those who believe the development may have pushed Israel towards a one-state solution to the detriment of Palestinians.

Abraham Accords made many Israelis less interested in the Palestinian issue since Israel now already has relations with Arab countries even as the conflict with the Palestinians continues, former Israeli Foreign Minister and Justice Minister Tzipi Livni Haaretz has said according to Israel's newspaper.

Livni is warning that Israel is sliding toward a "one-state reality" that would threaten the country's Jewish and democratic character. He was speaking at the Haaretz-UCLA conference on Israeli national security.

Livni expressed hope that the U.S. administration and the new government in Israel would take steps to keep open the possibility of a two-state solution.

"We have to decide what is our national interest. We want a secure Jewish and democratic state. To achieve that, we have to divide the land," Livni said, adding a one-state solution was something Israel could not afford.

The conference was organized by Haaretz English Edition and UCLA's Y&S Nazarian Center for Israel Studies. Livni arrived fresh from a trip to the United Arab Emirates.

She said that Israel's relationship with the UAE has turned into a "warm peace" since the signing of the Abraham Accords, unlike previous peace agreements.

During her visit there, she shared, senior officials in the country discussed cooperations with Israel not just in the security and intelligence spheres, but also in fields like health and science.

Livni said that a two-state solution should not be seen as an Israeli "favor" to new allies in the Gulf or to close neighbors like Jordan, but something that is in Israel's own interest.

Also during the conference, Haaretz journalist Noa Landau hosted a panel discussion on different possible solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

Micah Goodman, author of the best-selling book "Catch 67", shared his theory of "shrinking the conflict", which has been adopted by Prime Minister Naftali Bennett. Goodman discussed at length steps that could be taken on the ground, such as economic initiatives and infrastructure

investments, that will not lead to the end of the conflict, but could lead in his view to stability and quiet.

Gilead Sher, a former Israeli peace negotiator and former chief of staff to Prime Minister Ehud Barak, challenged the idea and said that "there is no such thing as managing the conflict."

Sher advocated for a two-state solution, which he said could later lead to different configurations down the road. "We have to deal with the core issues, and maybe later, after we have a partition of the land between the Jordan River and the Mediterranean Sea into two nation states, we can proceed toward a structure more like a confederation or other ideas," he stated.

Ameer Fakhoury, director of the research center at Neve Shalom (Wahat al Salam) and an adviser to joint society projects, advocated for a confederation alternative to the two-state solution, in the spirit of the "two states, one homeland" initiative.

Fakhoury said that "we need to develop our political imagination and think how to share the land, not how to separate." He added that the conflict will not be solved until people on both sides understand that "we cannot live here without seeing one another."

FBR's Big-Ticket POS System Falls on the First Hurdle

The system is being fooled, allowing retailers to arbitrarily issue invoices with or without sales tax.



By Azeem Waqas

It reportedly cost the exchequer PKR 70 billion, and the hype was deafening ahead of its arrival: The Federal Board of Revenue's POS system would put an end to tax dodging at the retail counter, yielding a boon of additional tax revenue and helping greatly in documenting the economy.

But FBR's flagship project seems to have fallen at the first hurdle: Probably helped by the vendors trusted for its installation, the retailers seem to have found a way around the system, allowing them to charge or skip tax at will, a The Truth International (TTI) investigation has revealed.

A well-known food outlet of the federal capital is issuing invoices with or without FBR POS barcode. TTI is in possession of both types of invoices from the outlet.

This clearly means FBR has failed to develop a robust system to capture the real-time sales of such retailers. Charging (read paying) tax remains subject to the sweet will of the counter

clerk, as was the case with manual or retailers own POS system invoices.

It beats credulity that FBR has no safeguards against such scuttling of the system. "Retailers are dodging the POS with the help of vendors", an official of the FBR told TTI. "FBR has detected a case in which a vendor had installed a tampered POS system to enable under-reporting of the sales of the outlet".

Retailers vehemently deny all responsibility for such abuse of the system, shifting the blame to the vendors. Chairman Chain Store Retailers Association Tariq Mehboob says if FBR has detected a tampered POS system, it should register an FIR against the vendor and publish its name so that retailers may know it and be cautious about it in future.

He alleged the FBR was deliberately creating a monopoly regime for the POS vendors through regulations.

Some retailers own up the system is being thwarted. "FBR has authorised 46

vendors to install POS machines throughout the country", one retailer told TTI. "Some vendors are offering two options to the retailers – one for reporting to FBR and other for misreporting".

"FBR has not developed a system to check functioning of the installed software" Tariq Mehboob said. "What system do they have in place to check if there is a connivance between the vendor and retailer?"

Mehboob also says certain sales of the retailers are not being processed by the POS system and FBR has failed to regulate and control it.

Retailers are resisting the installation of POS. They assailed the installation of POS before Lahore High Court, Rawalpindi Bench as well as Islamabad High Court. However, both the august courts threw out their petitions.

Official sources say due to the retailer's stiff resistance and technical issues, FBR has reduced the target of installing 50,000 POS machines to 25,000 to 30,000 during the current fiscal year.

Retailers are protesting against POS system and are resisting its installation. Bringing the retailers in the tax net through POS machines have become a gigantic task for FBR officials as the one trying to cheat the system while hundreds of thousands are facing hurdles to be integrated with the POS.

The object of FBR's POS software is to link already in operation software of retailers with FBR's computerised system in order to control the leakage of Sales Tax Revenue caused through misdeclaration and suppression of sales.

The idea is that if retailers report their actual sales to the FBR authorities, it will result in enhancement of revenue collection and minimise the revenue leakage.

Tariq Mehboob said that chain stores are facing issues in installing POS as incorporating all inventory and purchasing through non-registered cottage industry has become next to impossible for the retailers.

He explained that it took almost a year to install a POS system at a Tier-1 retail outlet. POS vendors have to do a barcoding on all items, keep its record, prepare a ledger, train all the staff and then process it. It also costs dearly to the retailers.

Another complication is that different

retailers are using different companies' POS software and POS services providers have their own issues ranging from software limitations to connectivity to system maintenance.

"Real time reporting of sales will result in reporting of actual sales to the authorities and payment of Sales Tax on the actual sales of the retailer", tax consultant Ashfaq Mehmood told TTI.

FBR needs to verify the functioning and integrity of the POS system installed at the retail outlets. It should put in place a fool proof mechanism to save this major documentation initiative.

If a vendor installs a software that can keep two separate tallies of sales, arbitrarily allowing the retailer to charge Sales Tax or not, the utility of the system becomes to naught.

It matters little if such duplicitous software has been verified with the help of the Pakistan Revenue Automation Limited (PRAL) or any other department.

The FBR would deny 60 percent input tax credit in case of non-integration. The board has decided to raise sales tax demand against Tier-1 retailers not integrated with the FBR's POS system by the deadline.

Service Sector contributes 60 percent of GDP out of which 35 percent comes from retailers & wholesalers, which means retailers & wholesalers contribute 19 percent of GDP. The tax contribution to tax revenue, however, is a mere 2-3 percent.

Retailers are main channel through which all imported goods, locally manufactured goods and smuggled goods are sold to the general body of consumers.

FBR has introduced a modern system of documentation through automation whereby points of sales have been linked with the server installed at FBR HQ. The server issues FBR invoice numbers and barcode.

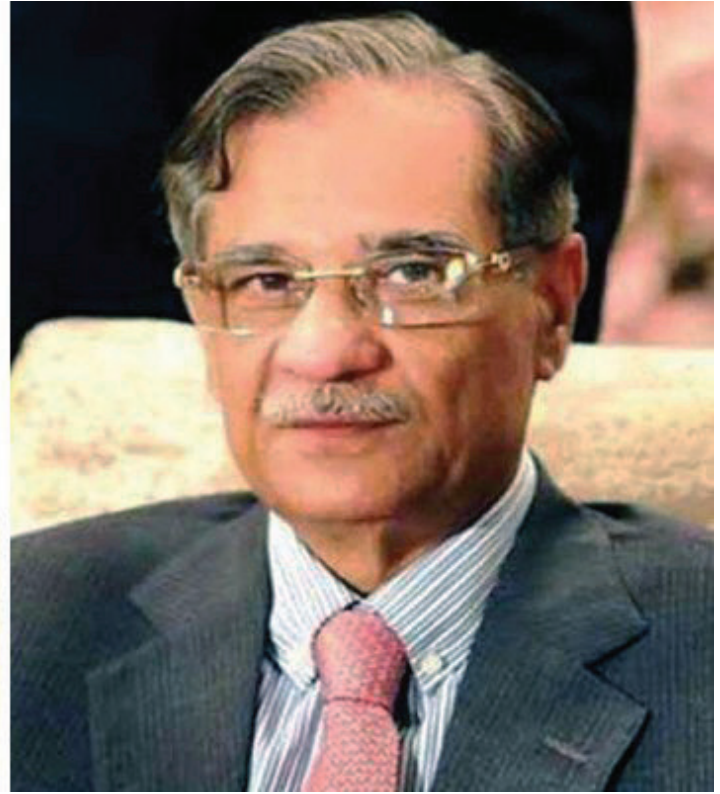
An app 'TAX ASAAN' has been lodged which enables the customer to know whether his paid tax has been deposited in the public exchequer or otherwise. The longstanding demand of the taxpayer of minimising the intervention of taxman has been addressed as well.

Chapter XIV-AA and rule 150ZEA of Sales Tax Rule, 2006, amended through SRO 1203(I)/2019 dated 10.10.2019, made it compulsory for Tier-I Retailers to integrate all their Points of Sales (POS) with the FBR computerised system for real time reporting of sales.



A Dark Cloud Over Judiciary that has a Silver Lining

A retired judge's explosive accusations against a former chief justice must not be taken lightly.



By Asadullah

On the face of it, the affidavit from the former top judge of Gilgit-Baltistan apex court comes across as a damning indictment of the way former Chief Justice of Pakistan Saqib Nisar ran the country's judiciary.

But its publication has presented our superior judiciary with an opportunity to take a look at some of the darkest chapters of its chequered history and hopefully, put its proverbial house in order.

It can be used to sift right from wrong and restore the integrity of Pakistan's superior courts in the eyes of the public – as acknowledged by the honourable Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court.

The affidavit of the former Chief Judge of Supreme Appellate Court (SAC), the Gilgit-Baltistan's top judicial forum, the constitutional courts may have a 'silver lining' for the chequered history of Pakistan's judiciary especially superior courts as it has given an opportunity of judicial accountability.

Rana Mohammad Shamim, former Chief Judge of the Supreme Appellate Court (SAC), the Gilgit-Baltistan's top judicial forum, briefly stopped over in the UK on his return from the US.

There, he took time out to record a statement under oath before an oath commissioner, which was subsequently published by The News International, the English-language flagship of Jang Group of Newspapers.

The affidavit, a veritable charge sheet against former Chief Justice Saqib Nisar, gave rise to widespread anger and incredulity over social and mainstream media.

Rana Shamim states in the affidavit that in July 2018, the then Chief Justice visited Northern Areas along with 27 members of his family and he hosted them in Gilgit.

The affidavit claims that one evening during his stay in Gilgit, Justice Nisar made a call to a judge of the IHC where former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, his daughter Maryam Nawaz and retired Captain

Mohammad Safdar had filed the appeals against their conviction in Avenfield Apartment reference.

Nisar, alleges Shamim, used the phone call to secure an assurance from the IHC judge that Sharif family will not be released until the General Elections 2018 were over.

Following publication of the affidavit, IHC Chief Justice Athar Minallah commenced contempt of court proceedings against Rana Shamim, Jang Group's editor in chief Mir Shakeel ur Rehman, resident editor Aamir Ghouri, and Editor Investigations Ansar Abbasi.

The court has also appointed Muhammad Fahim Wali, Vice Chairman, Pakistan Bar Council; GM Jamil, President Pakistan Federal Union of Journalists; and senior counsels Mr Faisal Siddiqui Advocate and Ms Reema Omer are as amici curiae.

Mr Abbasi stood by his story and claimed that its publication met all journalistic standards as prior to filing the story, he verified the authenticity of the document

[affidavit], contacted Rana Shamim, and also made a call to the former Chief Justice to include his point of view.

However, the stance of Justice Minallah was altogether different. He was of the view that since the matter related to an IHC judge, and Mr Abbasi published the story without verifying the facts related to the IHC, therefore, prima facie, the media house committed contempt of court.

He noted that the “affidavit was not part of any judicial proceedings. It related to the appeals pending before this court and which were fixed for hearing on 17.11.2021.”

It may be mentioned that on Nov 17, 2021, IHC Justice Aamer Farooq and Justice Mohsin Akhtar Kayani were scheduled to hear the appeal of Maryam Nawaz against her conviction in Avenfield Apartment reference.

The affidavit of Rana Shamim claimed that Justice Saqib Nisar made a call to Justice Farooq on that evening.

The court order noted that “The Editor and Editor-in-Chief were unable to give a satisfactory explanation in the light of the editorial principles and tenets of journalism. The object to publish the news story regarding the purported affidavit, prima facie, appears to have been an attempt to obstruct the administration of justice.”

It further stated: “The news report and the purported affidavit have cast scandalous aspersions on the integrity, independence and impartiality of the Court and its judges. Liberty of the press and freedom of speech are of paramount importance but they are not absolute. They are subservient to proper administration of justice.”

However, IHC Chief Justice has termed this an opportunity for the accountability of the judiciary.

The court order stated: “[The media house] have attempted to obstruct the administration of justice. They have failed to give a plausible explanation as to why proceedings under the Contempt of Court Ordinance, 2003 should not be initiated against them.

“This is an opportunity for holding this Court accountable. The onus is on the alleged contemnors to establish their bona fides by satisfying that the alleged aspersions are not unfounded to the extent of this Court and its Honourable Judges.”

The legal circles on the other hand are of the view that this matter should be probed thoroughly to ascertain the facts of the matter.

Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) Vice President Maryam Nawaz and other opposition figures demanded inquiry in this matter.

Ms Sharif demanded that the former Chief Justice Saqib Nisar be summoned and probed in this case, whom she accused of misusing his authority to victimize PML-N and to intimidate the politicians loyal to Nawaz Sharif.

She said that the conspiracy against PML-N stood exposed by former IHC Justice Shaukat Aziz Siddiqui, late accountability judge Arshad Malik, and now the former Chief Judge Gilgit-Baltistan Supreme Appellate Court Rana Mohammad Shamim.

She expressed hope that Chief Justice of Islamabad High Court (IHC) Athar Minallah who enjoys a good repute and commands respect would bring out the truth of the matter.

Contacted by The Truth International (TTI) for his response, former Chief Justice Saqib Nisar termed the affidavit as baseless.

He denied calling the IHC Judge and said that there is not even an iota of truth in the information which is falsely attributed to him.

He however did not show any intention to file a defamation suit against the former GB Chief Judge saying that taking a decision at this point of time might be premature as everyone knows it as a lie.



The Mixed Bag of COP26

Perhaps it was unrealistic to expect COP26 to deliver all the goods after all.

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The COP26 ended in Glasgow with the resolve to keep the goal of 1.5C alive. The negotiators agreed to several measures to ensure that things remain on course to reverse the tide of climate change but fell short of expectations.

The United Nations estimates that with the agreed proposals the world is heading towards a 2.5C rise in temperature (another estimate put it at 2.7C) which is a significant improvement over the catastrophic rise of 4C prior to the Paris agreement but still not enough to ward off serious destructive long-term effects of climate change.

However, it can all change if the major polluters tighten their plans to achieve 2030 goals of halving the emissions.

The change in the wording of 'phasing out' to 'phasing down' coal on the insistence of India and supported by China disappointed many who saw this dilution of pledge as a sign of faltering resolve of the nations to stop climate change and as a result see the conference as a failure. Nevertheless, this is an extreme view or interpretation of the change in text, which should not be used to fog out the achievements of the conference.

One of the major achievements of the conference is that the world has finally become united to acknowledge and resolve climate change issues by arresting and reversing deforestation, accelerated phasing out of coal, ending international financing for fossil fuels, curbing methane production and stabilising the societies by mitigating the adverse effects of the ongoing climate change. The COP26 resolved to achieve all the goals set out in the Paris agreement.

Climate change is already playing havoc with the economies of poor and developing nations. They are not only to adapt to the ever-changing climate but also must suffer the losses and damage caused by it. The Copenhagen and Paris accords envisaged setting up of \$100 billion-a-year fund to help developing nations to adapt to new realities but ignored compensation for the ongoing losses and damage.

The Least Developing Nations demanded compensation for the 'loss and damage', but the proposal was resisted by the United States and many other developed nations. This fund is on the agenda now and will gather pace in the coming months and years.

Scotland and Wallonia (Belgium) along with many philanthropies became the first to contribute towards such a fund. This is a welcome development.

The parties of the conference also agreed to have ministerial level annual conferences to discuss and review the progress of the plans. The nations agreed to get together next year to submit improved 2030 emission reduction plans to close the gap between the goal of 1.5C and the estimated 2.7C with the expected trajectory achieved by the agreed proposals.



If the improved proposals prove robust then achieving 1.5C becomes a real possibility. If not, then the world is to face stark consequences.

The Glasgow conference also took up the unfinished agenda of the Paris agreement and tried to tie any loose ends. A standardised set of formats has been agreed to report plans, activities, achievements, technical knowledge, and capacity to ensure comparability and transparency.

Another tricky issue was the regulation of carbon markets. The COP26 has agreed on the rules and regulations in this regard and took care of the double counting of the same emission reduction claimed by different countries.

This will eliminate the inflated figures for carbon emission control. Aligning 'Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs)' within a time frame is another success of the conference. The countries have been encouraged to plan and report progress on a five-year cycle.

All these measures are essential for monitoring and evaluation of the national programmes to meet global targets. In the absence of such a framework, it would be very hard to measure the progress made.

Looking at progress made, one can say safely that COP26 proved to be a mixed bag. On the positive side the world has taken a decisive direction and has resolved to avert the impending danger. On the negative side, the proposed measures are not deemed enough to achieve the targets set out in the Paris agreement.

More needs to be done but the response of all the nations is encouraging and it seems there is willingness to do more. It has strengthened the resolve shown in the Paris agreement and laid the foundation for measurable progress in future.

The next few years are critical to watch the progress being made and plans approved. It is hoped that COP27 in Egypt next year will further strengthen steps agreed in COP26.

Will COP26 be Enough to Save the Civilisation?

Humanity's new pact to take collective action for climate change mitigation may be too little too late.



By Mishaal Ashraf

It has been hailed as a landmark deal that marks “the beginning of the end of climate change” and the “starting pistol” shot for its reversal, experts and activists still worry the pact signed at Glasgow’s COP26 is not enough to take humanity off the path of collective suicide.

Signed by nearly 200 nations after two weeks of gruelling negotiations, the deal acknowledges the commitments by countries so far to cut emissions of greenhouse gases are not enough to prevent planetary warming beyond 1.5 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial temperatures.

Scientific projections show warming beyond that level unleash catastrophic events including extreme sea level rises, crippling droughts, monstrous storms, and widespread wildfires.

Called Glasgow Climate Pact, the deal asks governments to strengthen those targets by the end of next year instead of every five years as previously agreed.

The ten-page document is the embodiment of humanity’s new covenant to stick together

in an increasingly uphill struggle to avert catastrophic climate change that could threaten the survival of our civilization and in all likelihood, our species.

In a first for any such pact, the deal asks countries to reduce their reliance on coal and roll back fossil fuel subsidies. Fossil fuels have long been identified as the primary drivers of planetary warming, with coal contributing about 40 percent of global annual CO2 emissions.

The deal acknowledges the loss and damage “that climate change has already caused and will increasingly cause” – and urges developed countries “to at least double their collective provision of climate finance for adaptation” to developing countries from 2019 levels by 2025.

This is being seen as a signal victory for climate activists and poor nations who have for years pushed for financial assistance to countries already facing loss and damage from climate change – although developed countries have essentially just agreed to continue discussions on the topic under the deal.

Climate finance remained a contentious issue at the conference. Developed nations had in 2009 pledged to provide USD 100 billion per year to emerging economies by 2020, but the deadline was missed.

The object of the arrangement was to help poorer nations adapt to climate change as well as transition to cleaner energy. Conference president Alok Sharma said financing to the tune of approximately USD 500 billion would be mobilised by 2025.

The response to the deal has been mixed. Government leaders took an optimistic view of the pact, with UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson hoping the world would “look back on COP26 in Glasgow as the beginning of the end of climate change”.

A raft of notable side deals too. The United States and the European Union spearheaded a global methane pledge in which around 100 countries have committed to reduce methane emissions by 30 percent from 2020 levels by 2030.

The United States and China, the world’s two biggest carbon emitters, announced a

joint declaration to cooperate on climate change measures, reassuring observers of their intention to accelerate efforts to combat global warming.

Several voluntary pledges to phase out gasoline-powered cars, decarbonize air travel, protect forests, and ensure more sustainable investing came from companies and investors.

Yet several leading climate experts and activists have voiced their utter disappointment, especially over how the wording over cutting coal use had been watered down at India's request, and how only coal was mentioned, allowing the rich countries to continue use of oil and gas.

"Just saying the words 1.5 degrees is meaningless if there is nothing in the agreement to deliver it", Sara Shaw of Friends of the Earth International was quoted as saying by BBC. "COP26 will be remembered as a betrayal of global South countries".

Pakistan among frontlines countries

Many low-lying countries around the world including Maldives and Bangladesh are at risk from rising sea levels. For example, according to some projections, a quarter of the area of Bangladesh may be under sea by year 2100.

At the other end of the spectrum is Pakistan, threatened with severe water shortage as glacial depletion dwindles the flow of water feeding into the Indus River system.

As the glaciers in the Hindukush range melt at an accelerating pace due to global warming, water discharge in the Indus will initially increase, followed by a decline, causing large parts of Pakistan to become severely water stressed.

Experts say this scenario will compromise water and food security of about over 40 million people living in the Indus basin.

India's coal problem

India's reliance on coal for power generation makes it the third major polluter of the world. At COP26, New Delhi worked with other countries to achieve a watering down of language on coal, drawing ire from activists and state parties alike.

"We do not need to phase down coal but to phase out coal," said the Swiss delegate, alluding to the change of language advocated by India. EU envoy Frans Timmermans concurred: "The longer you take to phase out coal, the more burden you put on natural environment and your economy".



Ditching fossil fuels

At the heart of the climate change are fossil fuels. Burning coal, diesel, petrol, and methane releases carbon dioxide (CO₂) into the atmosphere, a greenhouse gas that traps heat and raises global temperatures.

Another greenhouse gas is methane, released into the atmosphere from "flaring" – the burning of natural gas during oil extraction. (Animal manure and landfill sites other notable sources of atmospheric methane.)

Switching automobiles, households, and industries to electricity generated by wind or solar power plants and limiting air travel are some of the options on hand right now.

Carbon capture

But planting trees is not enough. We must cleanse the atmosphere of CO₂ produced by a century of burning fossil fuels. Arresting deforestation and planting more trees will be important to achieving the 1.5C target but we will have to do more.

Emerging carbon capture technologies to remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, or stop its release could play a role, as could technologies to capture carbon emissions where they are produced, such as at coal-fired power plants, and bury it deep underground.

Climate finance

Some developing countries at the receiving end of climate change do not have the resources required to fight and adapt to climate change and must be provided financial assistance. This was why rich countries had pledged to provide USD 100 billion in financing by 2020, but the deadline has been missed.

COP26 has given fresh impetus to the efforts to extend financial support to help poor countries move towards greener energy, outlining a plan to put the funding on tap by 2023. This is a step in the right direction but more how seriously the designated donors take this commitment remains to be seen.

Threat perception

Our planet has been around for around 4.5 billion years, and the earliest climate record on the earth's crust dates back to about 3.2 billion years ago. Ever since, the earth has always had a climate; and change – including occasional abrupt change – has been an essential characteristic of the earth's atmosphere-climate system.

Never throughout this period has climate change threatened the planet or its basic inhabitability – although in all probability it was the driver of more than one mass extinction events.

Experts have warned we may be in the middle of a mass extinction event right now, with approximately 20 percent of all living species, including a million animal species, facing near-term extinction. What distinguishes it from past mass extinction events is that it has been triggered by a technologically advanced species.

Conclusion

In the final reckoning, the jury is still out on whether COP26 commitments are enough to arrest global warming and reverse the ill effects of climate change. Much depends on how the signatories to the pact – especially the rich nations – match their words by action.

If they fail to deliver on their commitments, the human kind may end up like dinosaurs, who according to one study caused their own extinction by polluting the atmosphere with methane by breaking wind.

An Air of Hazard

While Europe doubles down cutting damage from air pollution, authorities in Pakistan are yet to wake up to the menace.

TTI Report

While Pakistani authorities are in denial over how bad air pollution is in the country, European Environment Agency has announced the invisible killer accounted for 307,000 premature deaths across Europe in 2019.

This was an improvement over 2018, when deaths linked to fine particular matter — with a diameter below 2.5 micrometres or PM2.5 — were estimated at 346,000.

This clear reduction in the number of deaths is attributable to favourable weather but above all to a progressive improvement in air quality across the continent, the European Union's air pollution data centre said.

Fine particles, which penetrate deeply into the lungs, led to nearly a million premature deaths in the 27 EU member nations in the early 1990s, according to the report. Regulation and enforcement helped cut that figure by more than half to 450,000 by 2005.

Lahore has consistently ranked high on the global ranking of cities with high air pollution along with India's Delhi.

On 17 November 2021, Lahore had an air quality ranking of 348, well above the hazardous level of 300, Aljazeera said in a report quoting IQAir, the Swiss technology company that operates the AirVisual monitoring platform.

The worsening of air pollution in Pakistan in recent years has been blamed on a mixture of low-grade diesel fumes and smoke from seasonal crop burn off. The situation gets particularly grim in winter when fumes coalesce into stagnant clouds of smog due to colder temperatures.

On 18 November 2021, Lahore had an air quality ranking of 343 and PM2.5 concentration in the city's air was 42.7 times above the WHO annual air quality guideline value, according to the IQAir website.

According to WHO, air pollution causes seven million premature deaths every year across the globe. In September, the alarming statistics led the WHO to tighten its

recommended limits on major air pollutants for the first time since 2005.

Air pollution remains the biggest environmental threat to human health in Europe, the agency said. Deaths linked to ground-level ozone in 2019 also dropped 13 percent to 16,800.

Fatalities caused by nitrogen dioxide — coming from vehicular and industrial emissions — fell by a quarter to 40,000 between 2018 and 2019.

Even if the situation is improving, the EEA warned in September that most EU countries were still above the recommended pollution limits, be they European guidelines or more ambitious WHO targets.



The EU wants to slash premature deaths due to fine air pollution by at least 55 percent in 2030 compared to 2005. If air pollution continues to fall at the current rate, the agency estimates the target will be reached by 2032.

Meanwhile in Pakistan, "In recent years, residents have built their own air purifiers and taken out lawsuits against government officials in desperate bids to clean the air, but authorities have been slow to act, blaming the smog on India or claiming the figures are exaggerated", the Aljazeera report said.

The authorities have announced a ban on Euro-2 fuel during the smog season to rein in alarmingly high levels of environmental pollution in Lahore. Punjab Finance Minister Hashim Jawan Bakht has said only Euro-5 petroleum products will be allowed for sale in Lahore starting December.

Interestingly, Pakistan announced a nationwide phasing out of Euro-2 standard for petroleum fuels — that has been obsolete internationally since 2000 — in June 2020.

Announcing the development, Prime Minister's Advisor on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam had said Euro-5 standard would be enforced for petrol as of 1 August 2020, and for diesel as of 1 January 2021.

Apparently, that timeline hit snags for some reason, as Euro-2 fuel is still on sale in Lahore.

Scientists have studied people exposed to high levels of air pollutants over extended periods of time and have found strong causal relationship between exposure to ambient air pollutants and development and progression of cardiovascular disease and risk factors.

They say air pollution causes premature deaths from heart disease, strokes, and lung ailments including cancer and asthma.

Air pollution has also been reported to have deleterious impacts on the mental health of those exposed to it.

Particulate matter in the atmosphere can be absorbed into the bloodstream and interfere with the functioning of the brain and the nervous system.

This can lead to concentration impairment, memory problems, and difficulty in emotional regulation.

Air pollution is especially bad for children's mental health, both because their higher rate of breathing and leads to higher intake of pollutants and their developing brain is more susceptible to harm from pollutants.

As well, atmospheric pollution can harm lung development and cause respiratory infections in children.

Citizens and activists say Pakistan needs to address air pollution on war footing both to avoid its heavy toll in terms of public health and safety and to ease human suffering.

Some Are More Unequal

Who job is anyway it to ensure the children of slum dwellers have access to education?



TTI Report

Six years after the (missed) first deadline for the global Education For All (EFA) programme, the children living in Pakistan's urban slums remain without access to elementary public education, a study of four urban districts of Pakistan has revealed.

Universal access to education first rose on the global development agenda at an EFA conference spearheaded by UNESCO in 1990. It soon became a global movement and was adopted by the Dakar Framework in April 2000 at the World Education Forum in Senegal, Africa, with the goal that all children would receive primary education by 2015.

It is well known that the residents of the country's urban slums lack access to basic facilities like water, sanitation, and drainage. They have to make do without access to public education as well may come as a bit of shock to many, but it is true and backed by empirical data after the publication of this study.

Launched in mid-November, the first pilot report of the study, undertaken by Idara-i-Taleem-o-Aagahi (ITA) as part of Annual Status of Education Report (ASER), focused on learning quality in the urban slums of Pakistan. The endeavour was supported by the UK's Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO).

ITA CEO Baela Raza Jamil shared some of the key findings of the survey at its launch in Karachi. The survey covered 114 urban slums, reaching out to 2,275 households, 2,285 mothers and 6,411 children aged 3-16.

Jamil hoped the data collected on the course of the study would now help the authorities concerned to take action or see how to remedy the issues that surfaced by the initial survey.

Her presentation gave an overview of the extremely challenging living conditions in urban slums. "Deprivation of entitlements to water, sanitation and hygiene extend to lack of adequate

educational facilities in urban slums", she said. "At least 20 percent of the surveyed urban slums in each district have no government schools".

Contrary to the common perception that urban slums are populated by transients rather than residents, over 56 percent of the population of the surveyed slums was found to have lived in the same settlement for more than a decade or equal to a 10-year education cycle.

Coming to enrolment of children in whatever schools there are in the surveyed urban slums, Ms Jamil said that more children (59 percent) were enrolled in private schools including madrassahs and non-formal education facilities than those enrolled in government schools (41 percent).

Enrolment increases significantly from the age of five and peaks at age 10. About 30 percent or one in three children aged 16 are out of school. Government school enrolment is

higher in Lahore at 59 percent while private school enrolment is highest in Korangi, also at 59 percent.

“The enrolment in madrassahs is eight percent”, Jamil said. “It is significantly higher in urban slums than trends observed in the regular ASER national surveys (1.5-2.5 percent).

“While Korangi, Lahore and Malir’s madrassah enrolment is 2.6 percent, 2.1 percent and 2.5 percent, respectively, Karachi-West has 24 percent of urban slums students or one in four children enrolled in madrassahs”.

Looking at the learning outcomes of the children living in urban slums, she said that the recent ASER 2021 Covid-19 study in 16 rural districts revealed statistically significant learning losses. Further findings brought out contributing factors in the current situation such as household earning or wealth, parents’ education, technology available for usage, etc.

A panel discussion that followed the presentation had experts air their views regarding the pilot report. Bureaucrat Waseem Ajmal said that the report reflected how demographic changes affected the system of education.

“It also provokes you to come up with solutions for children facing specific demographic challenges”.

Special secretary of the Punjab School Education Department Dr Suhail Shahzad agreed with the findings of the report, and said many existing urban schools were functioning on rural frameworks.

Resident Representative of UNDP Pakistan Knut Ostby said school closures because of Covid-19 had adversely affected children’s learning achievement, and lauded the report as a timely effort in this situation, hoping it would have a positive impact on learning.

FCDO Education Team Lead for Pakistan Kim Bradford Smith said the report had produced a wealth of data that would be invaluable help in designing quality education interventions. “It clearly shows there is significant inequality in learning in areas and living conditions”, she said.

Punjab P&D Department’s Member Education Khalid Sultan said the problems highlighted in the report were really the tip of the iceberg.

Muhammad Toheed of the Karachi Urban Lab said that urban slums were a neglected part of society. “They show a disconnect

between authorities and the communities”, he said. “There is also a problem there with documentation and enrolment processes”.

The EFA goals contributed to the global pursuit of the eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), especially MDG 2 on universal primary education and MDG 3 on gender equality in education, by 2015.

They recognize that ending poverty and other deprivations must go hand-in-hand with strategies that improve health and education, reduce inequality, and spur economic growth – all while tackling climate change and working to preserve our oceans and forests.

Access to education is now integral to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, adopted by all United Nations Member States in 2015, provides a shared blueprint for peace and prosperity for people and the planet, now and into the future.

At its heart are the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), which are an urgent call for action by all countries - developed and developing - in a global partnership. One of the goals (goal 4) deals directly with education: “Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all”.



Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all

Why Europe is Bracing for Another Winter of Covid-19

Vaccinate, vaccinate, vaccinate – and do not drop the guard just yet!



By Ayesha Javaid

Experts have warned from the beginning there was no room for complacency in humanity's struggle against the deadly Covid-19 epidemic. Their worst fears have now been confirmed – in Europe of all places – where a deadly mix of complacency and vaccine hesitancy has allowed the killer bug to return with a vengeance.

In a recent survey, 23 percent of unvaccinated Germans polled said they were inclined not to get a covid-19 jab in the next two months – and a staggering 65 percent said they would “definitely” not do so. Conducted by German pollster Forsa, the survey polled 3,048 Germans.

Germany – along with Austria and Switzerland – has the highest shares of unvaccinated people in Western Europe. Saxony, the eastern state, has Germany's lowest vaccination rate, just 57.5 percent, and its highest infection rate.

“Many in Germany thought the worst of the pandemic was behind them”, an op-ed piece in the international edition of Der Spiegel said in November. “But the country is now being slammed by

the fourth wave – fueled by millions of people who refuse to be vaccinated and political leaders who have abdicated leadership.”

With over two-thirds of the population fully vaccinated, the overall numbers are not high. Yet intensive-care wards in both Austria and Germany were inching ever closer to capacity in the second half of November.

Small wonder Austria announced a full national Covid-19 lockdown starting 22 November after an earlier lockdown imposed on the unvaccinated was seen as inadequate. German Health Minister Jens Spahn said in the third week of November the country faced “a national emergency” as the pandemic situation was “more serious than last week.”

Spahn's remarks came a day after Germany reported more than 50,000 new infections, a record, with Delta variant hitting the country hard. Robert Koch Institute (RKI), Germany's center for disease control, also reported 235 deaths from the virus on that day alone.

According to a BBC report, German leaders have already agreed to introduce restrictions for unvaccinated people in areas with high hospital admissions, and parliament has backed requirements for people to show Covid passes on buses and trains, and in workplaces.

Several other Europe countries have fared similarly. Ireland, having one of the continent's best vaccination rates, slapped a midnight curfew on the hospitality industry in the third week of November amid a surge in cases.

New restrictions have been put in place in the Netherlands, prompting violent protests and Portugal – with 87 percent of its population is inoculated – is considering fresh measures as infections rise.

Given the high transmissibility of the Delta variant, unvaccinated pockets of society would continue to drive transmission until countries achieve inoculation rates of the mid-90s of their total population, according to Sam McConkey, head of the International Health and Tropical Medicine department at the RCSI University of Medi-

cine and Health Sciences in Dublin.

"What we have now is an epidemic of the unvaccinated", he was quoted by CNN as saying. "About 10% of our population over 12 is unvaccinated, and we're seeing an epidemic in those people".

BBC says the Europe regional director of the World Health Organization, Hans Kluge, has warned of a hard winter ahead. He blamed insufficient vaccination coverage along with "the easing of preventive measures and the spread of the more transmissible Delta variant".

Vaccine hesitancy in Europe (as elsewhere) is fueled by traditional attitudes, fake news, conspiracy theories, and political ideologies. In Germany, research has linked high rates of coronavirus infections with far-right political ideology.

"In areas of Germany where the radical right is particularly strong, state-imposed protection measures designed to stem the spread of the pandemic are not well liked", says a Der Spiegel report. "And coronavirus case numbers have grown disturbingly high."

Quoting the findings of a study conducted by an interdisciplinary team at the Research Institute for Social Cohesion and a researcher from Munich, the report, "The higher the number of votes the [far-right]

AfD got in a region in the 2017 election, the faster the coronavirus spread there in 2020."

Even without the right-wing campaign against some imagined "corona dictatorship", anti-vaxxer tendencies have a long history in Germany. When Emperor Wilhelm I introduced a vaccine requirement in 1874 against smallpox, an organized resistance to the decree quickly popped up and even published its own newspaper called "Der Impfgegner," – The Anti-Vaxxer.

The paper printed caricatures depicting the vaccinated with cow ears, since the vaccine was made using the cowpox virus. Der Spiegel says people today say that Bill Gates has planted microchips in the vaccine to control humanity – although that degree of whack-jobbery applies to only a relatively small group.

Another factor contributing to Europe's rising caseload could be waning immunity from the first round of jabs. "Europe's initial vaccine rollout accelerated quickly in the early months of 2021, but nations are now reckoning with the gradually waning immunity of those doses" says a CNN report.

"Two real-world studies published last month confirmed that the immune protec-

tion offered by two doses of Pfizer's Covid-19 vaccine begins to drop off after two months or so, although protection against severe disease, hospitalization and death remains strong.

"Studies have shown similar outcomes for the AstraZeneca and Moderna shots, which are also in use in Europe."

Dr. Anthony Fauci, director of the US National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, told CNN quoting recent data from Israel show that among people age 60 and older, those who received a booster were less likely to become severely ill than vaccinated people who had not received a booster.

Still, rates of severe disease remained highest among those who were not vaccinated.

In conclusion, Europe's experience clearly brings out the fact the Covid-19 pandemic is still very much with us. It also demonstrates how vaccination is certainly a part but not the whole of the solution, and that protective measures are still necessary.

Finally, it tells us that the definitive answer to whether and how the pandemic will end will take more research, more time, and more patience than we have given the problem up until now.



Caliphates and sultanates of non Arab world

PART 2



By Azmat M Saqib

Consequences of failed war of independence were that in 1857, Queen Elisabeth was proclaimed the Empress of India. East India Company was dissolved, and British ended 800 years of Muslim rule in India. Muslims were seen as culprits and a source of chronic danger while Hindus came closer to the new rulers. A rise in Indian nationalism was seen resulting in establishment of 'India National Congress' in 1885 and 'All India Muslim League' in 1906. Both the ethnic nations worked for independence from the British rule under their respective parties. Hindus wanted a liberated united India, while Muslims in the West and East of subcontinent wanted an independent Muslim state. British left India and partitioned the country; Pakistan came into being on 14th and India on 15th August 1947.

The Ottoman Empire ruled much of Southeastern Europe, Western Asia, and Northern Africa for six centuries (1299-1924). It was founded by the Turkoman tribal leader Usman. Devlet-i-Aliye-i Osmaniya (the Ottoman Empire) was named after its founder. After 1354, with the conquest of Balkans Ottomans entered Europe.

In 1453, Sultan Muhammad Fatih conquered Constantinople and ended the Byzantine Empire. With Constantinople as its capital, controlling lands around Mediterranean Sea, stretching to three continents, the empire was at the center of interactions between the Eastern and Western worlds for six centuries. The Empire reached the peak of its power under Suleiman the magnificent (1520-1566). The Empire's boundaries peaked around 1683 AD to 5.2 million square kilometers.

When Hejaz and the holy cities of Mecca and Medina were taken over by Sultan Salim I (1512-1520), the caliphate was also transferred from the Abbasids to Usmanis (Ottomans). Thence onward, Sultan was the temporal governance title and Caliph the spiritual head of the Muslim world, both carried by the ruler of Ottoman Empire at Istanbul, till 1924 AD. Ottomans' superior governance system from Caliphate seat of power at center to provincial and local levels, semi autonomous and autonomous region and vassal states helped them to control such vast expanses from North Africa till Caucasia and from Hungary till Mesopotamia. Their superior armies helped them to provide support to borderline regions and also quell rebellions in the regions. Religions of all faiths had independence to practice in their own regions, such as, Europeans states and north Caucasia but during the Empire's decline years, political rebellions were dealt with ruthlessly, sometimes with indiscriminate killing of minorities. When Jews were expelled from Spain in 1492, Ottomans welcomed them and were inducted in governance system.

Till mid eighteenth century, both the Janissary system and Timar Sepahi system strengthened the ottoman military capability tremendously. They had superior arms up to seventeenth century against their enemies. Military powers and seafaring skills and technologies helped them control all the sea routes in and around Mediterranean Basin. Law of the land was based on Islamic Sharia, and religious scholars along with their semi autonomous trusts (waqf) were very independent. Usually every large Masjid had a school (Madrassa), a dispensary-cum-hospital and sometimes a

caravan serai for travelers. Religion based education was common among the subjects. DE seating of a Caliph was only possible if the Ulema board (religious scholars) gave a fatwa based on sound religious reasoning.

Ottoman rule can be divided into four periods, rise (1299-1453), expansion and peak (1453-1566), stagnation and reform (1566-1827), decline and modernization (1828-1908) and lastly defeat and dissolution (1908-1922/24).

Rise (c. 1299-1453): In the century after the death of Usman I, Ottoman rule began to extend over Anatolia and the Balkans. This period is marked with Byzantine-Ottoman wars for Anatolia (13th century), Bulgaria-Ottoman wars and Serbian-Ottoman wars waged in the mid 14th century. Except for Constantinople, most of the lands surrounding the city were wrested away from the Byzantine, and Ottomans became a dominant power over Serbia, Balkans and Bulgaria.

Expansion and peak (c. 1453-1566): Sultan Muhammad the Conqueror, in 1453 conquered Constantinople, ending the Byzantine Empire. He allowed the Eastern Orthodox Church to maintain its autonomy and land in exchange for accepting Ottoman authority. In the backdrop of tensions between the states of Western Europe and the Byzantine Empire region, the majority of the Orthodox population accepted Ottoman rule as preferable to Venetian rule.

In the 15th and 16th centuries, a period of expansion, the Ottomans prospered under the rule of line of committed and effective Sultans. Due to its control of the major overland trade routes between Europe and Asia, the empire flourished economically. Sultan Salim I expanded the Eastern and Southern frontiers by defeating Shah Ismail Safavi of Iran and Mamluks of Egypt and conquered Hejaz. Suleiman the magnificent (1520-1566) conquered Belgrade in 1521 as well as Southern and Central parts of the kingdom of Hungary. He attempted a failed siege of Vienna in 1529. Yet Transylvania (Romania), Wallachia and intermittently Moldavia, became tributary principalities. In 1535, the Ottomans wrested control of Mesopotamia (Iraq) from Persia along with an access to the gulf. In 1555, Western Armenia, Western Kurdistan and Western Georgia came under Ottomans through a peace treaty with Persia. French and the Ottomans became allies against Habsburg; as a result, Ottomans took control of most of the Venetian Empire. Habsburgs accepted Ottoman ascendancy in Hungary in 1547. By the end of Suleiman's rule, the empire had expended to three continents, became a dominant naval force and entered a Global power struggle with Iberian Union (leaders of Christian World). Ottomans even sent its forces in Southeast Asia to Aceh Sultanate (Northern Sumatra) and Muslim Philippines against Spanish and Portuguese expeditions to Christianize the region.

Stagnation and reforms (c. 1566-1827): In the second half of sixteenth century, the Ottoman Empire came under intense strain from inflation and the rapidly rising costs of warfare that were impacting both Europe and Middle East. The Empire underwent a series of reforms of its political and military institutions to meet these challenges, enabling it to successfully adapt to the new conditions and remain powerful, both militarily and economically. Despite the growing presence of Europeans in the Indian Ocean in

sixteenth century, Ottoman trade with the East flourished. Cairo, in particular, developed into a major center for Yemeni coffee trade and throughout seventeenth and eighteenth century it remained a center for prosperity.

In 1511, Venetian Cyprus was conquered by the Ottomans. As a result of Cretan war (1645-1669). Venice lost much of Dalmatia (a part of Croatia), its Aegean island possessions and Crete.

The Sultanate of Women (1533-1656) was a period when mothers of young Sultans ruled on behalf of their sons. The most prominent women were Kosem Sultan with Greek ethnicity (mother of murad IV) and her daughter-in-law Turhan Sultan. During the koprulu era (1656-1703), effective control of the empire was exercised by a sequence of grand viziers from koprulu family.



Ottomans had to face defeat in Austro-Turkish wars of 1716-1718, but after Austro-Russian -Turkish wars (1735-1739), ensuing treaty of Belgrade gave back control of territories lost earlier, to Ottomans. Later in this period educational and technological reforms were introduced, including the establishment of higher education institutions which were strongly resisted by religious clergy. By the late 18th century, after a number of defeats in the wars with Russia, the Ottomans realized that they would have to keep up with Western technology in order to avoid further defeats.

Salem III (1789-1807) made the first major attempt to modernize the army, but the religious leadership and Janissary corps resisted and cost him the throne. But his successor, Mahmud II in 1826, eliminated the Janissary corps in a bloody fashion.

In 1811, the fundamentalist Wasabi's of Arabia, under all-Saud family revolted but were crushed by Governor of Egypt in 1818. In 1829, Southern Greece (Peloponnese) gained independence. In 1830, French invaded Ottoman Algeria. In 1831, Muhammad Ali pasha, Vali of Egypt declared independence. In 1830, Greece declared independence after bloody wars (1821-1829). Ottomans from here onwards became weak and needed support of foreign powers to protect their rule. By the end of 19th century, the Ottoman Empire was called the "Sick man of Europe".

To be continued....

The Drive to Restore Lahore's Priceless Heritage

The Walled City Authority's missionary zeal is paying off.



By Muhammad Zahid Rifat

Lahore has seen the ebb and flow of many kingdoms and empires. It has been built and rebuilt, conquered and destroyed many times over the centuries. Today, none of those kingdoms and empires is around anymore, and all those kings and conquerors are gone, but Lahore lives on.

The cultural capital of Pakistan and one of the world's most historically fascinating cities, Lahore has retained much of its historic heritage. The walled city of Lahore is well known for several historic monuments including the Lahore Fort, a World Heritage site, Badshahi Masjid, and Wazir Khan Masjid – to name a few.

About 2000 buildings within the walled city display a vast range of architectural features that reflect something of the centuries Lahore has seen. Almost all major monuments, buildings, havelis, and gardens of Lahore are of Moghul period, 1524 to 1752, during which it reached its glory.

For the last about 15 years, the walled city of Lahore has been undergoing renovation, conservation, preservation, and rehabilitation in an attempt to restore its old grandeur.

It all started initially at a small level but now has developed into a major conservation and restoration activity under the auspices of the dedicated Walled City of Lahore Authority (WCLA).

According to information gathered from different sources, way back in 2005, the federal government requested Aga Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC), headquartered at Geneva, Switzerland, to make technical contributions to the World Bank funded area development pilot project known as Shahi Guzargah (Royal Trail).

The work began under a public-private partnership framework agreement signed in 2007 with the provincial government of Punjab.

AKTC worked with the Punjab government since 2007 on a project aimed at sustainable development of the walled city. Since the establishment of Walled City of Lahore Authority in April 2012, the AKTC has switched to partnering with it.

Under its partnership with WCLA, several landmark projects have already been completed and many more are under execution. Some of the completed projects covered conservation of the Shahi Hammam; conservation and restructuring of the northern wall of Masjid Wazir Khan; Conservation and restructuring of Chowk Wazir Khan and Wazir Khan Masjid façade; rehabilitation of Shahi Guzargah; restoration of Gali Sarjan Singh inside Delhi Gate; conservation of picture wall of the Lahore Fort; and conservation of Shah Burj Complex and conservation of Royal Kitchens at Lahore Fort.

Besides AKTC, which continues to be

the main provider of technical assistance to WCLA, German Embassy in Islamabad funded the restoration of Gali Surjan Singh in 2007. The USAID had funded the conservation and restoration of Sunehri Masjid in 2011 and conservation of Wazir Khan Chowk in 2017.

Major developments in the framework and working of the WCLA were indicated in the last week of September 2021 during its 7th meeting in Lahore with Chief Minister Punjab Sardar Usman Buzdar presiding and WCLA Director General Kamran Lashari presenting three year's performance report and also getting his contract extended further.

Briefly, the Badshahi Masjid is going to be within the purview of the authority. WCLA will revamp the Masjid and the tombs of Bibi Pak Daman, Hazrat Bahauddin Zakariya, Hazrat Shah Rukn-e-Alam, Hazrat Shah Shamas Tabrez and Khwaja Ghulam Farid in Lahore, Multan and elsewhere besides revamping the historical worship places including those of the minority communities in different cities.

The WCLA would also be carrying out Dilkish City Programme in Lahore,

Bahawalpur, Mukltan, Muridke and Faisalabad and take steps for opening of Roshnai Gate in the provincial capital for the general public.

WCLA Director General briefed the meeting about six projects which have been completed and 10 other projects which were in progress, four projects including restoration of dilapidated historical buildings of the Walled City while drainage system has also been restored with assistance from Lahore.

Besides undertaking conservation, restoration, and renovation of religious and historical monuments, the WCLA also works to promote tourism under its mandate.

Tourism inside the streets and havelis of old Lahore was something new for the people when WCLA started it in 2013. Besides walking tours of the Shahi Guzargah (the Royal Trail) which was started in 2012, arrangements were made for guided tours and the interested local residents were provided training as the tourist guides.

Besides, local rides in a traditionally decorated rickshaw and tonga tours were also

introduced in 2015. Both local and foreign tourists can now take nightly tours of Hazoori Bagh Baradari, Alamgiri Gate of the Fort, Roshnai Gate, Sheesh Mahal, Picture Wall, Badshahi Masjid, tomb of Allama Iqbal, and Samadhi of Ranjit Singh.

According to the information available on official website of the WCLA, there are 22 religious and historical monuments inside the Walled City of Lahore.

These are Hazoori Bagh Baradari, Roshnai Gate, Allama Iqbal tomb, Wazir Khan Mosque, Chitta Gate, Wall of Raja Dina Nath, Wazir Khan Hammam, Haveli Nau Nihal, Mariam Zamani Mosque, Tomb of Malik Ayaz, Faqir Khana Museum, Haveli Dhayan Singh, Mubarak Havil, Haveli Nawab Sahib, Badshahi Masjid, Masjid Wazir Khan, Sonehri Masjid, Masjid Saleh Muhammad Kanbuh, Unchi Masjid, Neevien Masjid, Masjid Patolian and Masjid Moran Tawaif.

The city founded according to one legend by a son of Lord Rama has survived both its benefactors and tormentors of the yore, and in all probability, it will survive its current managers. Only time will tell if any of their deeds will stand the test of times.



The UAE Phenomenon of the Cricketing World

Could this tiny Gulf nation soon be hosting a Pakistan-India international series?

By Ali Abdullah

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) just played hosts to the ICC World T20 2021 with great success, an event that brought titans of the cricketing world to this tiny Gulf nation amid great fanfare.

Looking back, they hosted the second halves of both PSL 2021, IPL 2021 this year alone – and the string of cricketing events they have hosted goes further back. Have you ever wondered what gives UAE – lightweights as a cricketing nation – the standing to host such high-profile cricketing events?

The central location and the open doors policy of the UAE are certainly part of the answer – as is the high-level royal patronage accorded to cricket: The Emirates Cricket Board is chaired by none other than His Highness Sheikh Nahyan bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, an important royal.

Incidentally, the Sheikh has a keen and abiding interest in Pakistan and he has been instrumental in developing Pak-UAE ties. He owns an estate in the Sindh province with a personal game reserve near the mouth of the Indus River used for falconry and hunting.

Sheikh Nahyan's Abu Dhabi United Group is a major investor in Pakistan, holds controlling stakes in Warid Telecom, Wateen Telecom, and Taavun (among others), besides Bank Alfalah, of which the Sheikh is the founding chairman.

Sheikh Nahyan Mubarak Al Nahyan is also a recipient of Pakistan's highest civilian award, the Hilal-e-Pakistan, conferred upon him by the President of Pakistan in 2005.

Returning to the UAE stature as a host of high-octane cricketing events – the final piece of this puzzle is Abdul Rahman Falaknaz – the unassuming Chairman of Dubai Cricket Council – an incorrigible cricket aficionado who recently offered to host a bilateral series between India and Pakistan.

"The best thing would be to get India-Pakistan matches here," Falaknaz was quoted as saying by Khaleej Times. "When Sharjah used to host India and Pakistan all those years ago, it was like a war. But it was a good war, it was a sporting war and it was fantastic."

Pakistan and India have not played bilateral cricket in almost two decades owing to political tensions. The last time they played was in 2013, when the Green Shirts visited India to play three Twenty20s and two One-Day Internationals.

"I remember [Bollywood actor] Raj Kapoor came once with his family. During the awards night, he took the mic and said, 'How wonderful it is to have these India-Pakistan battles in Sharjah. Cricket brings people together, cricket has brought us together and let us remain this way,'" recalled the DCC chief.



"So this is what we would like to do. If we can convince India to come and play here against Pakistan once a year or twice a year, it would be fantastic."

The recent T20 World Cup was staged across three venues in the UAE – Sharjah, Dubai and Abu Dhabi – in the UAE while some matches of the preliminary round matches were played in Oman.

Falaknaz, who received school education in India, is a pioneer of cricket in UAE. The sport was virtually unknown in the country when he first got his friends to play the game of cricket with him in Dubai in 1958.

Although UAE became an associate member of the International Cricket Council (ICC) in 1990, Cricket still has a very low participation rate amongst the Emirati population, with the majority never having experienced the game.

According to the ICC website, the UAE national squad currently includes only 3 Emirati nationals, and The Board is implementing a development programme as part of a larger strategic plan in growing the game.

The object of the programme is to ensure a steady integration of national players available for selection in all forms of the game in the future.

The ECB now has the resources to take professional coaching into local schools and provide playing opportunities that have been limited before. A resource book of cricket in Arabic has been created and playing equipment provided to encourage and support this learning and development.

In addition, the Programme has been bolstered by the employment of a dedicated Arabic speaking Development Officer who will be able to take the game forward.

Pakistan and India are yet to respond to the offer made by Falaknaz, but let us keep our fingers crossed his vision is realised sooner rather than later. After all, who can say no to the prospect of a Pak-India showdown on the cricket field?

Thespianz' Comedy Tackles the Issues of Youth and Age in One Go

Stage play 'Ghabrana Nahi Hai' feasts audiences at Karachi's PACC Auditorium.



By Faisal Malik

It is heartening to see how Karachi's cultural life is springing right back after remaining under the thick pall of Covid-induced lockdowns for well nigh two years. One of the unmistakable signs of this was "Ghabrana Nahi Hai", a comedy stage play highlighting how the fabric of family structure in our society is coming apart.

As Aristotle said, man is a social animal. Small wonder then, that human societies and states provide the bipeds of the globe with a supportive environment with sharing and caring mutual relationships.

However, amid the pressures of the mounting materialism and unbridled egocentrism in the contemporary world, it is easy to lose sight of how important human connections are to the wellbeing of the individual, irrespective of material wealth and pecking order.

To highlight the significance of family relations, especially parental relations, The Thespianz Foundation staged a comedy play with a tickling title, "Ghabrana Nahi Hai", at PACC Auditorium, the other day.

Produced by Thespianz Theatre, the Play was written and directed by Faisal Malik, the Artistic Director of Thespianz Foundation, while Sheikh Sameer Nadeem served the project as an Associate Director.

The play is a family story in which we come across a young boy named Fawad living with his parents in a middle-class neighbourhood of the city.

The protagonist Fawad is not mature enough to handle the responsibility of a wife or a family while his parents are burning with a desire to seek a beautiful bride for him because

Being of advanced age, they fear death can overtake them at any time, and they would rather see their son happily married before they kick the bucket.

The parents, Mr and Mrs Javed, are growing frail by degree. Not only must they support each other amid this adversity, they must also teach their wanton and careless son Fawad the values of family bonds and blessings of the parental support.

As he embarks on the business of

creating theatrical plays, Fawad comes across a girl named Sehrish who wishes to learn acting and to become a superstar and celebrity.

With the passage of time, Sehrish manages to create a niche in the hearts of Fawad and his parents by her caring and loving nature.

She teaches Fawad that it is only loving parents and a happy life with a caring partner that actually matter, and all other glamorous achievements and professional milestones are just occasional pleasures that drift the people away from their precious family moments and priceless company of their loved ones.

The play drives home the point that it is the spiritual and social strength that is being carelessly ignored these days and people are getting too involved in businesses and earning money.

When they do not pay due attention to their parents, relatives and friends, they gradually become lonely and miss the presence of the family treasures after they have lost them.

The Looming Hazards of Stealing Fire from the Gods

London's Courtauld Gallery has dusted up a stark warning from the past about a dark future: Oskar Kokoschka's Prometheus Triptych.



Desk Report

We generally look upon Prometheus as a heroic figure who stole fire from the gods for the sake of us mortals. In this view, he is seen as a benefactor of humanity and a progenitor of our civilisation, for it would not have been possible without fire.

But there has been no dearth of people taking the opposite view, from antiquity to the present day – according to which Prometheus is a symbol of human arrogance, overreach, and blind folly.

For example, Mary Shelley subtitled her 1818 novel *Frankenstein* as the Modern Prometheus. And Prometheus is the title of the 2012 science fiction horror film by Ridley Scott in which a billionaire businessman with a swollen ego sets out on a space odyssey provoking an alien threat that could cause wipe out the human species.

The Austrian artist, poet, playwright, and teacher Oskar Kokoschka CBE (1 March 1886 – 22 February 1980) was another great mind who subscribed to this view – as is obvious from his *Prometheus Triptych*, on

display at the Katja and Nicolai Tangen 20th Century Gallery at London's Courtauld gallery since its reopening on 19 November 2021.

Best known for his intense expressionistic portraits and landscapes and his theories on vision that influenced the Viennese Expressionist movement, Kokoschka had good reason to take a grim view of a civilisation built on fire: He saw humans rain the fire stolen from the gods on one another in two world wars.

Although it was invented in the 1800s, World War I was when the machine gun came into its own. Fully automated and capable of firing up to 450-600 rounds a minute, they were used by both sides to slaughter humans at a scale scarcely imaginable before.

Kokoschka saw action in World War I as a cavalryman in the Austrian army, and was seriously wounded in 1915. Deemed a degenerate by the Nazis, Kokoschka fled Austria in 1934 and obtained Czechoslovak citizenship the next year.

In 1938, when the Czechs began to mobilise for the impending Nazi invasion, he fled to the United Kingdom, where he would remain throughout WWII, painting anti-Fascist works.

Although not an active participant this time, he remained all too aware of the ravages of the war that saw humans wage violence on a scale that the destruction of WWI paled in comparison.

This, then, was the historical context of the *Prometheus Triptych*, painted by Oskar Kokoschka to a commission by Count Antoine Seilern in 1950 as a ceiling painting for the Count's London home.

The left-side canvas of the triptych draws deeply on the Greek myth of the netherworld. It shows Kokoschka himself as Hades, god of the Underworld, releasing Persephone for her brief sojourn into this world in the prime of spring.

The left side of the field is dominated from middle to foreground by the arched body of Persephone's mother, Demeter. Between

the feet of Persephone and Demeter is the head of the gorgon Medusa.

The middle canvas – the largest and by far the most ominous – draws on the biblical myth of apocalypse. It shows the four horsemen of apocalypse descend on a world full of people going about the myriad routines of the mundane life like worship, singing, bathing, etc.

Some of the people who have noticed the horsemen are aghast, while others, who are yet to wake up to the grim reality, are going about their business as usual.

The right-side panel depicts the punishment of Prometheus for his audacious transgression, as ordained by Zeus: An eagle eating away at his liver by day as he is tied to a rock. According to the myth, it would grow back every night, only to be eaten by the eagle again the next day.

BBC Culture art critic Daisy Dunn interprets the painting in the context of the then brewing cold war tensions, which is as it should be, for that was the exact historical context of the creation of the masterpiece.

On the other hand, the message of the Prometheus Triptych is just as relevant today: An ascendant and progressively assertive China and a resurgent and increasingly belligerent Russia squaring up to challenge the hegemony of a waning United States that is still the mightiest economic and military power of the planet.

What makes this situation even more fraught than the Cold War is that it has no established poles, no set rules of the game.

Ours is a time in which asymmetric warfare has refused to die down after over two decades of crusading and conflict is boiling over rather than simmering in several parts of the world.

Ours is a time when tactical nukes are becoming commonplace, great powers are determined to take their rivalries into space, and the Pandora's Box of militant ideologies has been opened, setting loose untold monsters.

Ours is a time in which Oskar Kokoschka's Prometheus Triptych is like fish in water.

In 1978, Count Seilern bequeathed the Prometheus Triptych – along with his great collection of old master paintings and drawings – to The Courtauld.

"This will be the first time that it has been seen in London for more than a decade", says The Courtauld website.

The display will present the triptych alongside photographs by the American photo-journalist Lee Miller showing Kokoschka at work on the canvas in Seilern's home.



HBL



My Phone. My Card.

First time in Pakistan, use your mobile phone as your credit card to make instant payments with HBL Pay.

Available only on Android phones with NFC functionality.



Euromoney Award 2021
Best Bank in Pakistan



Best Bank 2021
Pakistan Banking Awards



HBL CreditCard
The Most Rewarding Experience

Scan QR code to
download HBL Mobile



Available on
Google play

Terms and Conditions Apply.



111-111-425



www.hbl.com



HBL Mobile

