

The Truth International

15th - 31st January 2022

Foreign Funding Case
A futile exercise

IMF Programme
Can Pakistan live without IMF loan

Omicron
Will world go for another lockdown?

A Trip to Death



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

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



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>

CONTENTS

Editorial

Cold-blooded by Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 04**

City Notes

Rooting out the Kazakhs by M.A. Niazi – **Page 05**

Murree Tragedy

Murree's Snowy Catastrophe by Aimen Bukhari – **Page 06**

Politics

All You Need to Know about Foreign Funding Case by Sarfraz Raja – **Page 08**

To Be or Not to Be – Back in Pakistan by Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 10**

Allies in Parliament, Competitors Outside by Naveed Miraj – **Page 11**

Economy

How Important is Pakistan's IMF Bailout? By Mehtab Haider – **Page 12**

When Imports on Steroids More Than Offset Healthy Exports Growth by Javed Mahmood – **Page 14**

Investigation

State Bank of Who Exactly? By Azeem Waqas – **Page 16**

Europe and America, Here We Come! By Hamza Qureshi – **Page 18**

Something is Better than Nothing by Hamza Qureshi – **Page 20**

COVID-19

With Omicron Ascendant, Now is No Time to Drop Our Guard by Noor Aftab – **Page 22**

Covid-19 vs Freedom by Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 24**

Foreign Affairs

The Untold Perils Brewing Astride the Durand Line by Umer Farooq – **Page 25**

Are 75 Years of Animosity Enough? By Dr. Moonis Ahmar – **Page 27**

Central Asian Militants Have Afghan Taliban in their Crosshairs by Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel – **Page 29**

Will Afghanistan's Taliban Play Ball with the World? By Haq Nawaz Khan – **Page 31**

Robert Kaplan: How will American power be tested in 2022? By Shahmir Niazi – **Page 33**

Erdogan's Israel Gambit By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain – **Page 35**

History

End Times: A Muslim Perspective (Part 2) By Azmat M Saqib – **Page 36**

They Will Rise Again by Rana Azam – **Page 38**

Technology

Broadband for All? Yes Please! By Amna Shoaib – **Page 40**

Travel

Make 2022 Your Year to See the World by Shahmir Niazi – **Page 42**

Karachi is What Karachi Eats - Desk Report – **Page 44**

Sports

Can it Steal Beijing 2022's Thunder? Desk Report – **Page 46**

Legendary Leg-Spinner Yasir Shah Deserves a Second Chance by Khurram Kaleem – **Page 48**

Brilliant Babar Leads Pakistan to An Incredible Year of Cricket by Ali Abdullah – **Page 49**

Entertainment

Television Debutants of 2021 by Kaukab Jahan – **Page 50**

From Hasan Raheem to Natasha Noorani: The 13 most played Pakistani songs on CityFM89 in 2021 - Desk Report – **Page 52**

Obituary

Remembering Desmond Tutu: 'A Thorn in The Side of the Apartheid Government' By Mishaal Ashraf – **Page 54**

Book Review

A dog's purpose, The Lost World by Alizay Ashraf – **Page 55**

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

Cold-blooded

By Hammad Ghaznavi

Even 'tragedy' sounds a small word to describe what happened in Murree last weekend. Thousands of people stayed trapped in their cars for around 18 hours in a traffic jam as roads got blocked due to snowfall. Twenty three tourists, including 10 children, died while there was no rescue operation despite cries for help. The catastrophe, it needs to be underlined, did not occur in some godforsaken place up-north, near the glaciers; it took place, two hours from the capital, in Murree, the most developed hill-station of the country with a decent infrastructure.

Who is responsible for the Murree tragedy? Back to the basics: It is the state of Pakistan, according to the constitution, that is responsible for the protection of life of its citizens. The state expresses itself through the government. The federal and the provincial governments, obviously, are responsible for putting a system in place that ensures the safety of its citizens in general. There are division and district and tehsil level administrative structures of the government that execute the plans for the security of the citizens. Then there are departments concerned from National Disaster Management Authority to National Highway Authority. All the above mentioned entities, more or less, are responsible for the Murree tragedy.

The government insisted it was a 'natural calamity'. "If people die due to gas leakage in a room, the government is not responsible," said the PTI legislator from Murree, Sadaqat Abbasi. Information

Minister Fawad Chaudhry put the blame on the people for their 'reckless' behavior. In a word, the government's response was – it was none of our fault. The met office had forewarned of the heavy snowfall, the government was supposed to issue travel advisory but it did not. Whose fault? In the light of the emerging situation, was there a high-level meeting to devise a strategy to ensure the safety of the tourists as was the case in the past? Whose fault?

Murree, according to the official figures, can handle 4,000 vehicles at a time while there were about 120,000 vehicles at the hill-station that fateful weekend. Every car that enters Murree is counted at toll plazas, which means the authorities had the exact number of Murree-bound vehicles. Interior minister Shiekh Rashid revealed that the government overlooked the Murree entry points from the KPK side which was a 'mistake'. So, whose fault? A mere 17 inches of snowfall is not a 'natural calamity'. It is the failure of the authorities concerned, let's face it.

For clearing snow from the roads, there are SOPs. Every year three months in advance, the government finalizes contracts for the clearance of roads. What happened to that arrangement? The Punjab government has pretty decent snow removal equipment as well. Inefficiency and callousness reigned that night, let's confess. It is not difficult to fix the responsibility if we really want to.

The Punjab government has set up an inquiry committee, headed by the home

secretary, to probe the tragedy. The TORs of the committee, however, don't look encouraging. A half-baked effort will not lead the inquiry to a meaningful conclusion. Gravity of the incident demands not a bureaucratic fact-finding committee but a responsibility fixing commission with the power to punish the culprits. A judicial commission or a powerful, bi-partisan parliamentary committee can be the answer. Our track record in this regard is also not pretty as many such committees have been set up in the past without any meaningful outcome since these committees are comprised of members who are either directly accused/involved in the crime or come from the same flock. Is it any different this time around?

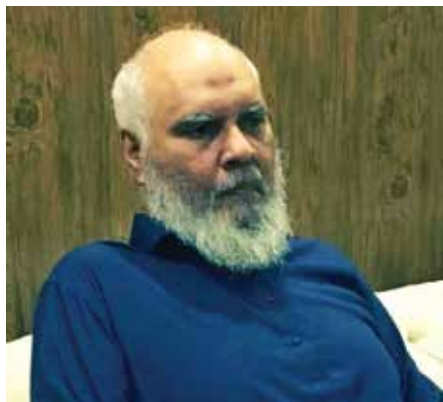
What happens in the aftermath of such tragedies in truly democratic countries can be found out in many of Prime Minister Imran Khan's previous statements as opposition leader. If those standards are applied here, our PMs will be resigning almost every week. But at least those directly responsible shall not go scot-free this time. There is already a huge trust deficit in such matters between the government and citizens. Is this an opportunity for the government to reduce this deficit?

If we want our country to be classified as a 'civilized' one, we as a state need to put a higher premium on human life in general. After all, that's what tells a civilized state apart from an uncivilized state.



Rooting out the Kazakhs

By M.A. Niazi



The protests in Kazakhstan are completely unjustified, and show what a namby-pamby bunch the Kazakhs are. Just imagine, they're protesting over the rise in the price of liquefied petroleum gas, used mainly in vehicles. Now if we in Pakistan were inclined to protest fuel price rises, I don't think any government could stick around.

Gone are the days when a 'four-anna' rise in the price of sugar was enough to bring down President Ayub Khan. That was over 50 years ago. In those days, that was a lot of money. To keep things in perspective, at the time of the 1857 Mutiny, the price of wheat in Delhi went up to an intolerable one rupee per maund (about 40 kg). If wheat sellers then had heard about the price today, they'd probably commit suicide.

Imran Khan is very concerned about the protests in Almaty. After all, the protests there are because the country is oil-rich. Actually, it's not just oil-rich, but also has the world's largest reserves of uranium ore. Not to mention that it's big and hot, which means a large area for solar power.

It seems that Russia is having to send in forces to make sure that the pro-Moscow government stays in place. The last time Russia sent forces into a Central Asian state was into Afghanistan, back in 1979, and it didn't end well. Maybe the Americans should go in? Well, they also went into Afghanistan, and it didn't end well either.

However, Imran will decide which side to support based on whether there are any accusations of corruption against the government. If there are, he'll oppose it. Otherwise, he'll support it.

His instinct is to favour it, because accusations of corruption can be flung around without any basis in reality. That hasn't stopped Imran or the PTI, especially when making allegations about members of the Sharif family, but when Babar Awan and Aleem Khan were accused and had to resign, NAB vindicated them, and showed that if you were in the PTI, accusations were false, and probably made by Nawaz's supporters just to muddy the waters.

I mean, look at the so-called foreign funding case. No Indian or Jewish donors turned up (well, not many, anyway). Well, it has become clear that the PTI has got a bad book-keeping problem. Instead of making Shabbar Zaidi CBR Chairman, the PTI should have made him work at straightening the party's books. The mistake that Fawad Chaudhry says was made, about hundreds of millions of rupees, was probably the fault of faulty book-keeping, not the ECP. Someone should have told Imran that when an organisation grows beyond a certain size, you can't keep its accounts on the back of an envelope, with a borrowed lead pencil.

Of course, Imran was right to say that the ECP should go after the PML(N) and the PPP next. I would be very disappointed if Ishaq Dar couldn't produce an impeccable set of books. A Former Finance Minister,

Miftah Ismail, actually has a doctorate in Accounting, so he could be roped in. I don't know how the PPP will fare. Its Finance Ministers, Hafeez Sheikh and Shaukat Tarin, have gone to the PTI, and if they couldn't do its books, then who could?

I wonder there've been no audios leaked in this case. Like a tape showing that the Chairman ECP had been ordered by somebody to make sure Imran got off the hook. Or one showing that it was Nawaz who made sure the PTI had to wiggle on the hook like a fish that had been caught. I wonder if anyone believes that Maryam Nawaz said what she said to Pervaiz Rashid, even though she has confirmed that it was correct. There've been so many audio leaks, it's impossible to keep track of them, let alone make any pronouncement about their veracity. Of course, the question does arise whether the recording was authorized. But so long as the national interest is upheld, who cares?

What was not recorded was the last words of any of those who died on the way to Murree, in what must be one of the weirdest episodes in the history of tourism. That the Information Minister had touted increased tourism as proof of how well the government was doing, brought a ton of obloquy on his head, enough to make an honorable man wish he had tried to get to Murree.



Murree's Snowy Catastrophe

How can we avoid such tragedy in future?



By Aimen Bukhari

Snowstorm-ravaged Murree has drawn the nation's attention with its harrowing visuals. It tragically killed several visitors. Pictures have been circulating on social media of a young police officer and his lovely family who got stuck in the snow and that they all died in the bitter cold. Last week's Murree disaster will scare people for a long time, and we pray such a tragedy never happens again.

The government has started an inquiry into the incident. Over 162,000 vehicles entered Murree from 3 to 7 January 2022, according to the initial investigation document. The roads leading to and from Murree were not repaired for two years, the report revealed.

These roads had unpaved patches that accumulated heavy snow, causing traffic jams. It blocked road from Rawalpindi to Murree at 16 points due to trees felled by a heavy snowstorm. At least 23 inmates of four to five vehicles died of carbon monoxide poisoning.

The report also stated that some 21,000 vehicles were stopped from entering Murree and they were returned. Heavy snowfall continued for 16 hours on 7 January, which resulted in four feet of snow.

All this highlights our collective indifference to effective urban administration and environmentally sound policies. Murree has been Pakistan's most popular tourist destination since independence, and generations of Pakistanis have returned to this colonial-era hill town for their short vacations.

It is a main tourist destination for Pakistanis but still being run from Lahore with a weak local government and limited building regulations, leading to big hotels and apartments cropping up poor waste management systems with garbage and sewage flowing everywhere, and unregulated and predatory hospitality industry. All this is damaging the beauty of Murree and its tourism industry.

There is also a lack of traffic management and an absence of an adequate communication system to advise the public of any weather warnings. This recent calamity has shown us that there is a need for public awareness and ethical local business practices to restore Murree to its former grandeur.

The government can try its best to enforce this, but people have to play their part too. We can only hope that this disaster will bring together government, business, and the public to prevent any more innocent lives from being lost in the future.

In recent years, Murree has become heavily populated and polluted. Its burden can be felt on the city's development, traffic, and tourist management. A makeover for Murree has become essential. Buildings that violate building policies should be demolished to set a precedent for the future and create a warning for capitalists that exploit Murree for their benefit.

There is also need of better of publicising the weather alerts and making sure that Murree and other snow-bound communities have appropriate snow removal equipment. Before last week's blizzard, the government issued a weather alert, but it could have done a better job. The severity of the snowstorm was not conveyed to the masses visiting Murree.

Murree's heavy traffic can also be regulated more efficiently. There is a pressing need to manage this traffic on weekends and national holidays. It can be done by controlling the traffic flow into Murree. It can be difficult in execution, but it is necessary to avoid future disasters.

During the height of the COVID-19 epidemic, the government managed traffic

to northern Pakistan extremely effectively, demonstrating that it is more about planning than capacity to implement. There are only a few entrances to Murree, including the Murree Expressway and Kashmir Highway toll plazas. Using these access points, the government can set a cap on the number of visitors allowed into Murree at one time. Technology, such as online visitor permit and family visit planning, can better regulate traffic in tourist areas.

Businesses also need to be regulated. Customers in Murree are being overcharged by hotels and restaurants that do not even meet acceptable quality requirements. Such businesses also do not pay taxes on their overcharges. And when business is slow, like it was this week, some companies raise their prices at random.

There should be some sort of customer feedback rating system where hotels are graded according to the evaluations of their customers, food and lodging standards are ensured, and companies get taxed to run Murree on a sustainable, eco-friendly basis. The government should consider and implement all this.

For Murree to go forward, local officials need to come up with an alternate vision. The public's understanding of their rights and responsibilities is essential to averting such calamities in the future. It is possible to save Murree from more destruction by following these basic ideas, and it is also possible to leave a better legacy for future generations.



All You Need to Know about Foreign Funding Case

Here is a case that could bring down the curtain on Imran Khan's political career



By Sarfraz Raja

Seven years ago, a founder member of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaaf and a former close aide of party Chairman Imran Khan filed a petition with the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) accusing Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) of receiving foreign funding and hiding bank accounts. At the time, nobody had an inkling it will one day become such a high profile case – or that PTI will be in power the time comes to rule on the petition.

That was the time when PTI was busy in their famous D CHOWK sit in against Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and this application was termed by PTI leaders as a move backed by Sharif and his Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) using a former PTI office bearer.

What was the plea?

Akbar Sher Babar who held various top positions in PTI for about ten years since its formation, including Central Secretary Information, Vice President and member of central executive committee, came up with an application before election commission of Pakistan requesting action against PTI

chairman Imran Khan and other office bearers for violating Political Parties Order (PPO) 2002.

The applicant claimed that from 2007 to 2012, PTI failed to declare the exact details of its funding and accounts, something they were legally bound to do. He said he found some irregularities in 2011, which he brought to Imran Khan's notice through a seven-page letter.

Babar said when he received no response and saw no action from party chair, he approached ECP and filed an application for hearing of this matter. He claimed that PTI did not declare fund received from abroad and their sources. He attached some details of foreign funding with his application including information on bank accounts and names of donors.

What is PPO?

Political Parties Order 2002 was issued during Gen Pervez Musharraf's tenure before 2002 general elections to regulate and control the functioning of political parties and later it was amended in elections act 2017.

This act clearly states, among other things, that:

- The fee and donations made by any member or supporter shall be duly recorded by that party;
- Any contribution or donation made directly or in directly by any foreign source including any foreign country, multinational, public or private company, firm, trade, professional association or individual shall be prohibited;
- Any contribution and donation prohibited under this act shall be confiscated in favor of government;
- Contribution and donations includes those made in cash, kind, transport, stock, fuel and provision of other such facilities; and
- Foreign source shall not include any overseas Pakistani holding national identity card for overseas Pakistanis NICOP issued by national Database and registration authority NADRA.

To be eligible for contesting elections, it is also necessary for all political parties to provide ECP the details - duly attested by a chartered accountant and



signed by party head – of their annual assets, liabilities, funds, and expenditures.

Case chronology

- Akbar S Babar filed application before election commission of Pakistan on 14 of November 2014 which was accepted for hearing
- On 1 April 2015, ECP in its order declared that PTI did not disclose its funding details and their source.
- PTI launched a challenge of ECP's jurisdiction for hearing this case, which was rejected on 8 October 2015.
- On 26 November 2015, PTI filed an application in Islamabad High court challenging status of Petitioner Akbar S Babar, arguing that the petitioner was acting in revenge as he had been expelled from the party.
- On 17 February 2016, Islamabad High Court referred the case back to ECP.
- ECP found no proof against Akbar S Babar regarding his expulsion from the party and constituted a committee to investigate his claims.
- The hearing in the Election Commission was temporarily halted due to PTI's approach to high courts.
- In March 2018, ECP constituted committee for security of funds.
- In July 2018, ECP approached state bank for PTI accounts details declaring lack of cooperation from PTI over the matter.

Cases against PML-N and PPP

Having exhausted all options to derail the case including challenging jurisdiction of ECP and status of petitioner, PTI submitted a cross application to scrutinize accounts funds and party assets of PMLN and PPP in 2017. ECP accepted their application and referred this to scrutiny committee as well.

Comparison between PTI and PMLN/PPP cases

In the case against PTI, one of their former important office bearer approached ECP

with many documented details of party accounts and donations by foreign sources. The complaint against PMLN and PPP was brought by their political opponent PTI, which submitted a sort of counter application based on allegations without much homework. Absent any solid evidence, it was manifestly an attempt to complicate and delay the matter.

Scrutiny committee report

The committee formed in March 2018 to completely scrutinize PTI accounts took almost four years to present its report to ECP, which was submitted in December 2021. A PTI request to keep the scrutiny committee report secret was turned down by ECP.



According to the report, PTI under reported an amount of PKR 312 million over the four year period from 2009 to 2013. An amount of over PKR 145 million was under reported in financial year 2012-13 alone.

The report said that PTI disclosed only 12 out of the 77 accounts it maintained with various banks. The party hid two bank accounts in 2008-09. It also did not give access to the party accounts in Canada and New Zealand.

Possibilities after committee report

Election commission would now hear PTI's viewpoint and defence regarding objections raised in scrutiny committee report before ruling in the matter. Experts

of election matters see the following possible outcomes in conclusion of the case.

1. Any donation or contribution prohibited could be confiscated in favour of government. That's what the law says. This could not only be politically damaging to PTI but also lead to further legal action for hiding facts.
2. In case of proved foreign funding a party could be banned, its members of parliament would lose their membership, and ECP could delist the party, withdrawing its election symbol.
3. A petition could be filed in any superior court for the disqualification of the party head under Articles 63 of the Constitution for hiding facts in annual returns submitted

with ECP. This could lead to his life time disqualification as we witnessed in case of former PM Nawaz Sharif.

Political reactions

Surprisingly enough, PTI has termed the scrutiny committee report as their success in the case. Information Minister Fawad Chaudhary says that this report vindicates their stance that PTI has a transparent funding system. He also demands release of scrutiny committee reports of PMLN and PPP accounts.

The opposition parties, on the other hand, consider it as a damning charge sheet against PTI and demand resignation of Prime Minister Imran Khan and a high level investigation into this matter.



To Be or Not to Be - Back in Pakistan

Nawaz Sharif's existential dilemma and his political narrative



By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The politics in Pakistan is in a state of tumult. Each actor is shooting in the dark claiming some breakthroughs with the establishment to the point of alleged begging by the establishment for help to get rid of the incumbent government.

It has been claimed that the establishment has run out of ideas to get out of troubled waters the present government has landed the country in. The chorus was started by former president Asif Ali Zardari and soon joined by others, especially Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), lest they lag behind in this war of establishing importance with the circles they opposed so vociferously, in the eyes of the public as an alternative to the present setup. It seems opportunism and not the principles rules the murky world of politics of Pakistan.

There are certain advantages of the adopted narrative. The rank and file of the parties is assured that difficult and uncertain times are over and it is now just up to their party leaders to decide when to wrap up the present set up and assume power as “the umpire” is desperate to once more support the old and tested players.

Secondly, it is a message to the general public that good days are coming back and rivers of honey and milk will be flowing again in a country that is so terribly dependent on foreign resources for running even its day-to-day affairs.

Thirdly, it is a message to the establishment that we are feeling homesick so let us talk about the arrangements that could bring back the old cosy golden days. Fourthly, if the immigration tribunal rejects the visa appeal, the ground is already laid down for returning to Pakistan for the sake of poor Pakistan and Pakistanis.

The other target is to put pressure on Tehreek-e-Insaaf and its government especially in the wake of its humiliating defeat in the first round of local bodies elections in Khyber Pukhtunkhwa. This defeat has been used as a pivot to build this narrative and pressure. The defeat has been depicted as a precursor of supposedly lost rapport with and support of the establishment for the present setup and portrayed as the beginning of the end of the present government of Imran Khan.

The narrative would have fizzled out if Prime Minister Imran Khan and his cabinet members had let it go without making it a big issue. Instead, Imran Khan's statement that preparations are being made to bring back Nawaz Sharif and make him prime minister for the fourth time lent credence to the ongoing narrative and created the perception that something is in the offing. It also raises serious questions about who runs the country and how.

It has strategic value for the opposition to build and sustain such a scenario but why the government would lend its support to such a narrative is a bit strange unless Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) also wants to tread the same path other parties have trodden before it in case it loses power.

For PML(N), it makes sense to create hype for the possible return of Mian Nawaz Sharif to control political damage in case the visa appeal fails – not for the reasons that it will end the legal channels but for showing desperation to stay and reluctance to go back to Pakistan by lengthening the legal route.

Even if the Visa appeal fails there are a number of options available to lengthen the stay of Mian Nawaz Sharif. The most important thing for PML(N) to assess is the political fallout of the desperate efforts to cling to London's abode. The stay can be prolonged for a long time even without recourse to political asylum as not all options for appeals are exhausted. Even after availing all the appeal options, if the decision remains against grant of visa, still other avenues are available that can prolong the stay.

The problem for Mian Nawaz Sharif reflects in the Shakespearean dilemma. “To be or not to be”.



Allies in Parliament, Competitors Outside

The two major opposition parties are clearly jockeying for advantage ahead of the wheeling and dealing phase ahead of next general election

By Naveed Miraj

The opposition parties are acting in concert in parliament, giving the treasury a tough time on various issues be it the recent Murree tragedy or the minibudget. Outside the parliament house, however, they appear to be poles apart and in competition with each other, each eager to portray itself as the leading contender for the coming general election.

This is very much visible from the separate dates announced by the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) and the PDM- for their respective marches on Islamabad against the government. The PPP, which parted its ways with the PDM only after staying part of the alliance of opposition parties for seven months, announced to march towards the federal capital from Karachi on 27 February while the PDM has set 23 March as the date for its march.

Sources within the PPP say the party was compelled to declare its own long march after the PDM's announcement.

"Given the electoral gains made by the JUI (F) in the recently held first phase of local government elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, it was imperative for the PPP to come up with a counterstrategy to ensure the PDM parties do not outshine us and make us irrelevant in the electoral arena", said a party insider.

The PPP has been openly jockeying for some time to position its young Chairman Bilawal Bhutto Zardari as the country's next prime minister. It follows that the party guided by former President Asif Ali Zardari, arguably the country's shrewdest political operator, will follow holistic political strategy in pursuit of that objective.

Under the circumstances, the possibility of the PDM and PPP getting together to mount a protest campaign is rather remote regardless of the statements coming from the ranks of PML (N) including that of senior leader Khawaja Asif who said it would be better if all opposition parties



agreed to join PPP's long march, slated to start on 27 February 2022.

JUI (F) Chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman and Mahmood Khan Achakzai of Pakhtunkhwa Milli Awami Party are said to be opposed to closing ranks with the PPP again as according to them, the party stabbed the PDM in the back when it refused to tender resignations from the parliament.

On his part, PPP Co-Chairman Asif Ali Zardari has also rubbished the idea of again joining the PDM.

Against this backdrop, the coming power shows at Islamabad have assumed huge importance. Whichever of the two rival political forces is able to draw a larger crowd in the federal capital will tend to eclipse the other's prospect in the next general election.

Addressing the PPP's Balochistan chapter a few days back, the PPP Co-Chairman emphasized promised his party's march would be an impressive event. However, according to political pundits, the PPP, having little presence in Punjab at present, has played a big gamble.

If the party of former prime ministers Zulfikar Ali Bhutto and Benazir Bhutto fails to stage massive rallies while passing through the country's most populous province, it will not only lose its appeal to electables but also

dampen any enthusiasm the all-important establishment may have for it.

However, according to observers, staging a sizeable rally in Islamabad will not be an issue for the party as the workers and supporters from across the country will be motivated to converge on the federal capital to put on an impressive show.

On the other hand, there is no denying that the component parties of the PDM, especially the Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) and the JUI (F), are better poised to stage a far bigger gathering in Islamabad given the support they enjoy in both Punjab and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa. The GT road rallies will greatly help the PDM build up the momentum for the final show in Islamabad.

The gatherings in the capital though will pose no direct threat to the government, as they will be seen as competing power shows by two rival opposition forces.

Although nothing can be said with certainty about the country's politics, especially when there is still one-and-a-half year to go in which to form political alliances before the next general election, the competing gatherings will nonetheless foreshadow the two party's prospects for the future political dispensation of the country, as the establishment too cannot afford to go pit itself against the dominant popular sentiment.

How Important is Pakistan's IMF Bailout?

Why Prime Minister Imran Khan's government is caught between a rock and a hard place



By Mehtab Haider

Pakistani authorities have started moving towards fulfilling pre-requisite conditions for seeking approval of the Parliament on two key pending bills for reviving the stalled USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) program.

But still, there is a gap between the cup and lips as the Government of Pakistan was left with no other option but to approach the IMF for getting an extension for holding a meeting of Fund's Executive Board knowingly Islamabad would not be able to meet its deadline for getting approval of Parliament prior to 12 January 2022.

Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin has confirmed to the journalists that the IMF was asked to extend the date for Executive Board and now it might be convened on 28 or 31 January 2022, to consider Pakistan's request to accomplish 6th review and release of USD 1 billion tranche under EFF program.

The Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf led regime has placed two bills including a mini-budget known as Tax Laws Supplementary Bill and State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Amendment Bill 2021 before the Parliament. The parliamen-

tary scrutiny was underway whereby it was expected that the supplementary finance bill dressed as Tax Laws Supplementary Bill might be approved soon by the Lower House of Parliament, after which it would be forwarded to the President, whose assent would grant it the status of an Act of Parliament.

The National Assembly Standing Committee on Finance has cleared the controversial State Bank of Pakistan (SBP), Amendment Bill, after incorporating three major changes in it. The first change incorporated by the NA Panel says no dual national can become Governor SBP. The second change says the Governor will not be allowed to work for other International Financial Institutions (IFIs) for two years. The third says the Governor and other Executives of SBP will have to appear before the Parliament whenever so required.

The PML (N) leader Ahsan Iqbal proposed that there should be one five-year term and a second term should be disallowed, but his proposal could not make its way into the final version of changes in the SBP Amendment Bill.

It remains to be seen how IMF responds to these changes in the SBP amendment bill. The government would have to pass this bill from the Upper House of Parliament where if Opposition joins hands could defeat the treasury benches. Then the government would have no other choice but to convene a joint session to pass the SBP amendment bill well ahead of the end of January 2022 to revive the IMF program.

The most important question to ask is what the resumption of the IMF bailout package can bring to Pakistan. First of all, the IMF program could bring a storm of inflationary pressures as feared by the parliamentarians belonging to the Upper House of Parliament (Senate) while deliberating upon recommendations on the proposed mini-budget.

The Senate can forward recommendations about the proposal to the National Assembly and it was the discretion of the NA to accept or reject these recommendations and pass the money bill.

There are some 462 items that fall in the basket of the Consumer Price Index (CPI) in accordance with the last Family Budget Survey done by the

Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (PBS) in the fiscal year 2015-16. The government preferred to withdraw General Sales Tax (GST) and imposed a 17 percent tax on infant milk, computers, laptops, mobile phone sets, and other daily use items just at a time when the CPI-based inflation stood at 12.3 percent for December 2021.

Now all economic experts agree that the CPI-based inflation was going to touch the 13 percent mark for January 2022 in the wake of withdrawal of GST exemptions and hike in POL prices and secondly because of a low base incomparable month of January last year 2021.

Second, the revival of the IMF program would result in a slowdown of the economy. Many experts have termed the IMF prescription tightening monetary and fiscal policies as a one-size-fits-all approach. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) has tightened its monetary stance by hiking the discount rate by 2.75 percent in the last two announcements.

Now fiscal tightening will be executed through a mini-budget, which will further slow down the economy, diluting Pakistan's chances of achieving the slated 5 percent GDP growth over the current fiscal year.

However, some gimmicks are also on cards as the government is planning to move ahead with re-basing of national economy so it might jack up GDP growth figure to some extent but on the basis of the existing base year of 2005-6, the targeted 5 percent GDP growth will be all but unreachable.

Another important question is how will Pakistan fare without the resumption of the suspended EFF programme?

Pakistan's current account deficit tallied in at USD 7.1 billion during the first five months (July-Nov) period of the current fiscal year. The trade data for December 2021 shows a more worrisome picture because it demonstrates that the increase in imports was not a one-off event, so more in-depth analysis is required before giving prescriptions to fix the ills of economy.

Trade deficit continued mounting and stood at USD 4.85 billion in December 2021 compared to USD 4.9 billion in November 2021 despite the massive devaluation of the exchange rate, higher policy rate, imposition of letter of credit margins, and other measures.

The imports bill stood at USD 7.6 in December 2021 compared to USD 7.889 billion in November 2021, indicating it declined slightly by 3.82 percent. Advisor to PM on Commerce Abdul Razak Dawood had claimed the imports decreased by USD 1 billion in December 2021 compared to November 2021 but it proved the wrong claim.

In the first half of the current fiscal (July-Dec period), the trade deficit doubled and touched USD 25.478 billion as against USD 12.344 billion in the corresponding period last fiscal, recording a surge of 106 percent.

Pakistan's exports fetched USD 15.1 billion in the first six months of the current fiscal year compared to USD 12.1 billion in the

corresponding period of the last fiscal year, registering a growth of 24.7 percent. On the other hand, imports stood at USD 40.5 billion in the first half of the current fiscal year, as against USD 24.454 billion in the same period of the last fiscal year, marking a 69.9 percent surge.

Experts believe that the current account deficit would be hovering around USD 1 to USD 1.5 billion in December so it is all set to cross the USD 8 billion mark for the first half (July-Dec) of the fiscal year.

This is exactly the level of the Current Account Deficit where it was standing in the first six months of the fiscal year 2017-18 and then it had touched USD 18 billion mark so it is yet to be seen where it stops in 2021-22. Analysts believe despite all monetary and fiscal measures; it would be hard to stop the CAD below USD 15 to USD 16 billion mark by end of the current fiscal year.

With this level of CAD, Pakistan's external financing requirement might be touching USD 30 to USD 35 billion over the short to medium term. At the moment, the foreign currency reserves held by the SBP stand at over USD 17 billion.

Considering Pakistan's debt repayment requirements and the meagre levels of projected forex inflows, the SBP's reserves will not be adequate to meet the country's needs without the resumption of the IMF program. This could plunge the country into a full-fledged balance of payment crisis. This doomsday scenario is precisely why the authorities are desperate to have the EFF resumed.



When Imports on Steroids More Than Offset Healthy Exports Growth

The numbers are in for the first half of the fiscal, and the bottom line is negative by a wide margin



By Javed Mahmood

Notwithstanding a healthy 26 percent year-on-year exports growth over the first half of the current fiscal, Pakistan's economy remains in dire straits on account of a sharp spike in imports, fueling the twin deficits and adding to the urgency of putting a suspended IMF bailout programme back on track.

Pakistan's exports showed positive trajectory over the first half of the current fiscal year despite serious endogenous issues like the ongoing gas crisis and strong headwinds, exceeding the target level of USD 15 billion by USD 125 million, Ministry of Commerce data shows.

Over the accounting period July-December 2021, exports amounted to USD 15.125 billion, registering an increase of USD 3.125 billion from the total of USD 12 billion posted in the corresponding period last fiscal year. Averaging at USD 2.5 billion a month, the figure represents a 26 percent year-on-year growth for the first half of the fiscal.

If this momentum is maintained over the rest of the fiscal, Pakistan's exports are on track to surpass the USD 30 billion exports

target set for the year. However, as winter progresses, the deepening gas crisis is casting an ominous shadow over this healthy growth.

Energy crisis hits exports

A 15-day suspension of gas supply that hit the industry in the Punjab province in December 2021 has already taken a grievous toll on the economy. The magnitude of lost textile exports alone from this shutdown has been estimated at USD 250 million, according to the All-Pakistan Textile Mills Association (APTMA).

Exports data for the month of December 2021 corroborates APTMA's concerns as the exports fell short of the target by USD 39 million mainly because of non-availability of gas to textile mills. In a letter to the Energy Ministry, the industry group has urged the government to ensure uninterrupted gas supply to avoid further losses.

Responding to the industry's SOS, the Ministry of Energy has restored gas for the export-oriented textile industry with effect from 29 December.

At present, textile sector is getting less than 75 mmcf/d gas though the industry is purchasing gas at USD 9/per MMBTU, instead of USD 6.5 mmcf/d announced earlier for this winter season.

APTMA says that the textile mills are operating at 80 percent capacity because of gas shortage, which directly translates to a 20 percent dip in exports.

Trade deficit

Imports over the first half of the current fiscal hit USD 40 billion. Lower exports inevitably inflated the country's yawning trade deficit, which tallied in at USD 24.85 billion for the first half of the current fiscal, representing a 100 percent growth over the USD 12.42 billion trade deficit recorded in the corresponding period last fiscal.

In the month of December 2021 alone, trade deficit crossed USD 4 billion for the first time, reaching USD 4.14 billion, marking a 54 percent increase over the corresponding month last fiscal.

Market analyst say this alarming increase in trade deficit is one of the key factors

contributing to the slide of Pakistani Rupee against the US dollar.

The way the imports are expanding at an alarming rate in the ongoing fiscal year, the trade deficit for the entire fiscal is projected to go beyond USD 45 billion, which would be the highest-ever in the history of the country.

Interestingly, in the first quarter of 2021-22, the government took some measures to put barriers in the way of rapidly growing imports and trade deficit, but the measures did not yield the desired results. Thus, if the hopes pinned to the higher taxation in the mini-budget to discourage imports did not work as per the expectations of the government, the country would see a disastrous situation on the external trade side with all time high trade/current account deficit and record high quantum of imports.

Current account deficit

In first five months of this fiscal year (July-Nov 2021), Pakistan has recorded USD 7 billion current account deficit as against a surplus of USD 1.7 billion in the same period in the last financial year. In November 2021 alone, the current account deficit expanded to USD 1.9 billion,

indicating an alarming situation on this front that was eroding the national foreign exchange reserves, undermining the rupee, and triggering inflation, putting extra financial burden on the consumers.

The international rating agency Fitch has projected current account deficit of Pakistan at 2.2 percent of the GDP in 2021-22 as against 0.6 percent in 2020-21, mainly because of the widening trade imbalance.

Remittances

Pakistan's remittances are showing robust growth in 2021-22, except for November 2021, when the State Bank of Pakistan reported an unexpected 6.6 percent decline, at USD 2.35 billion, down from USD 2.5 billion in October 2021.

However, in the first five months of this fiscal, the inflows of remittances stood at USD 12.9 billion, up 9.7 percent in comparison with USD 11.7 billion in the corresponding period of previous fiscal. In the fiscal year 2020-21, the inflows of remittances amounted to USD 29 billion, up from USD 24 billion in 2019-20.

Nonetheless, the momentum of growth will

be hard to maintain in 2021-22 because of different challenges on the external side. About 6.6 percent decline in remittances flows to Pakistan in the month of November 2021 is also an evidence of slump in this area.

The IMF package

On 10 January 2022, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) postponed the 6th review of its EFF package on a request from the authorities. Prime Minister Imran Khan's government has sought more time from the IMF for the approval of the Supplementary Finance Bill and SBP's Amendment Bill.

Both the bills have been presented in the National Assembly once again in the second week of January 2022 but the government needs more time to allow for a thorough parliamentary debate over the legislative proposals.

Parliamentary approval for both these proposals is a required prior action for the successful completion of the 6th review of Pakistan's EFF, paving the way for the resumption of the program, which is being seen essential to putting the economy back on its feet.



State Bank of Who Exactly?

Prime Minister Imran Khan needs it enacted to secure IMF support, but opposition says the new law compromises Pakistan's sovereignty



By Azeem Waqas

The government side says the passage of a proposed new law is essential to ensuring the functional independence of the State Bank of Pakistan and to protecting it from undue interference from politicians, who often keep their narrow political interests foremost.

Opposition contends it will effectively put the central bank outside Pakistan's control, compromising the country's economic sovereignty. Both sides concur it is being enacted as a prerequisite to the resumption of a stalled IMF programme – which itself is seen by many as an affront to the country's sovereignty.

In a setback to Prime Minister Imran Khan's government, some cabinet ministers are said to be sympathetic to the opposition point of view. This puts the government in a tight spot as it needs the IMF programme restored to avert a balance of payments crisis. The SBP (Amendment) Bill 2021 has finally been tabled for consideration of the National Assembly.

Officials say the draft bill gives greater autonomy to the central bank in line with international standards with the mandate of price control and fighting inflation by adopting exchange rate and

monetary policy in an autonomous manner without government's interventions.

Finance Ministry has said that by facilitating domestic economic and financial stability, the amendments will help support sustainable growth and avoid repeated booms and busts that have characterized Pakistan's past and led to painful consequences in terms of higher inflation, higher poverty, and lower growth.

Political parties and economist have raised serious objections on some of the clauses of the bill like barring federal government borrowing from the central bank. The controversial clause reads: "The Bank shall not extend any direct credits to or guarantee any obligations of the Government, or any government-owned entity or any other public entity."

Distinguished economist and public intellectual Kaiser Bengali says that passage of SBP Amendment Bill will make government answerable to foreign-owned commercial banks instead of parliament and the people.

He notes that the proposed law allows the government to borrow only from commercial banks, which are largely

foreign-owned, and asserts that any legislator voting for it, would be guilty of economic surrender.

Dr Bengali says the law may have two nefarious objectives: Opening a window of assured profit flow to foreign owners of commercial banks and binding the Government to interests and dictates of international finance.

He argues that passage of the law will be a death knell for our economic sovereignty, as commercial bank lending rates will always be higher this will further squeeze the poor.

"Autonomy sounds good on the surface, but details reveal a different agenda", says Bengali. "[The purported law] will change SBP from a national institution to an instrument of foreign financial control of our economy."

The amendments identify domestic price stability as the primary objective of the SBP, followed by financial stability and support of the general economic policies of the government.

Former Governor SBP and PM Khan's Advisor Dr Ishrat Hussain has also voiced his reservations concerning the bill. He says growth must be a primary objective of the central bank on a par

with price stability. He also opposes the bills proposed abolition of a joint coordination board bringing Finance Ministry and SBP around one table.

Ali Raza, a former president of National Bank of Pakistan notes that while Finance Ministry has been setting target of inflation and directing the exchange rate in the past, the new legislation empowers SBP to target inflation and determine exchange rate.

The brief says Pakistan needs restrictions on the sovereign's capacity to spend and borrow. It is also prohibiting refinancing activities in the country.



SBP is celebrating the results of both Mera Pakistan Mera Ghar as well as construction financing mandate. Both of these activities would be classified as development finance activities and will be prohibited under new SBP Amendment Bill.

As per the new bill: Amendment of section 20, Act XXXIII of 1956.- In the said Act, in section 20, after clause (5), the following new clause shall be inserted, namely: —“(5A) undertake any quasi-fiscal operations or development finance activities”.

The bill doesn't describe what are quasi-fiscal operations. This is a big oversight. The clause is prohibiting something but it isn't defined anywhere. Section 20 is prohibiting refinancing, or making an exception in section 20 such as “all quasi fiscal activities are prohibited with the exception of activities mentioned in section 17A). Clause 17A now reads:

18. Amendments of section 17, Act XXXIII of 1956.- In the said Act, in section 17- (a) for clause (1A), the following shall be substituted, namely:-“(1A) provide the refinance facility exclusively to the financial institutions falling under the supervisory jurisdiction of the Bank backed by such collateral and on such terms and conditions as may be determined by the Bank. This refinance shall not be provided to any person other than a financial institution. The Bank shall implement the refinancing facility exclusively in pursuit of its mandate, without compromising its primary objective of price stability. The Bank shall not use the refinancing

facility to directly or indirectly provide privileged access to funding to any financial institution or risk insurance of any specific sector.”

Islamabad based economist Dr Sajid Amin says SBP amendment bill is step in the right direction but pushing it through under pressure from IMF is bad optics, which will further hurt the credibility of Central Bank and monetary policy. He also emphasises the importance of broad-based debate on the bill before it is passed.

He says making SBP free from political influence and refocusing it on price stability is much needed and it is already very late. While revised SBP bill improves on some definitions, follow up work is needed on formal definitions, accountability and coordination mechanisms and restriction of appointments to only one term.

He also opines the core committee proposed to be formed under the new law must include member finance and people from other side of the aisle.

Officials believe protection of central bank officials for actions taken in good faith is a key element of its functional independence. They argue that provisions for such protection are not only a common practice in other central banks but also exist in other domestic laws.

The amendments, therefore, propose to add a provision for a general protection to SBP officials for all actions undertaken in good faith.

In addition, the Monetary and Fiscal Policies Coordination Board is proposed to be abolished, as its terms of reference overlap with the work that has been assigned to the Monetary Policy Committee under the existing Act and such a mechanism for coordination goes beyond provisions in the acts of other central banks.

Instead, a new mechanism for coordination is being proposed between the Finance Minister and the Governor, under which they would establish a close liaison and keep each other informed of matters that jointly concern the Ministry of Finance and the State Bank.

Finance Minister Shaukat Tarin stresses the new law will not put the SBP outside Pakistan's sovereign control, asserting that if it does, parliament can always pass a new law by simple majority to put it in its place.

The proposed law purports to bind the government to consult SBP prior to introducing any legislative proposal in the parliament that may have a bearing on the functions of the Bank. Officials say consultation in this context does not mean consent but merely getting SBP feedback and discussing.

Although SBP and Ministry of Finance have taken pains to bring clarity to the debate, experts believe that their explanatory briefs could use more evidence including examples based on hard data on controlling inflation, interest rate, and exchange rates to prove it a step in the right direction.

Europe and America, Here We Come!

After ICAO nod, PIA is raring to win back business lost to thrifty regional competitors



By Hamza Qureshi

The year 2022 is starting on a positive note for the country's beleaguered aviation industry after the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) said Islamabad had resolved the Significant Safety Concern (SSC) raised by it last year.

As you read this, Pakistani diplomatic missions in the UK, US, and EU are in touch with aviation authorities in those jurisdictions to work out the final nuts and bolts of the return of Pakistani airlines to their respective skies.

The Truth International (TTI) can report that Pakistan's ambassador to Germany Dr Muhammad Faisal received an in-depth briefing concerning the matter from Director General Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) Flt Lt (R) Khaqan Murtaza and CEO PIA Air Marshal (R) Arshad Malik in the first week of January 2022.

The envoy was expected to start meetings with member states of European Union starting last week. Envoys in the other two jurisdictions are expected to have sprung into action along similar lines at about the same time.

The Deputy Director General (Regulatory) at PCAA, Nadir Shafi Dar told TTI that after passing the safety audit and lifting of SSC, PCAA officials have contacted UK CAA and EASA to convey the resolution of safety concerns by ICAO. He said the two countries' aviation authorities have responded positively and follow up meetings are expected with both in the second week of January 2022.

The PCAA said that it will emphasize authorities in the US, UK and Europe to lift sanctions from Pakistani airlines at the earliest possible. Dar anticipated that permissions will be issued on a fast-track basis.

Dar said the ban on issuing licenses to pilots on civil aviation has also been lifted. This will make it possible to reinstate it licensing for aircraft engineers and pilots.

As of now, PCAA has outsourced both of its pilot licensing processes (Airline Pilot License and Commercial Pilot License) to a British company for a period of two years. After the agreement ends, PCAA will start issuance of licenses to pilots too. The facility is limited to aircraft engineers for now.

The intimation to this effect came via a letter from Denis Guindon, the Deputy Director of ICAO's Monitoring and Oversight Air Navigation Bureau after an arduous audit of PCAA.

The SSC was raised on 18 September 2022 as a result of an unfortunate statement by Pakistan's Federal Minister for Aviation, Ghulam Sarwar Khan.

Khan's speech of 24 June 2020 opened a Pandora's box which resulted in the US, UK, and EU banning PIA and other Pakistani airlines from operating in their airspace. The misinformed statement cost Pakistan dearly.

Khan stated on the parliament's floor that 30 percent of PCAA flying licensees issued to pilots were fake. Later, the inquiry called only 28 pilot licenses as dubious. As previously reported, only 6 licenses could be truly held for some kind of forgery.

Following Khan's speech, the European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA) banned all Pakistani airlines from operating in the European Union. The same was followed by USA's Federal Aviation

Administration and UK's Civil Aviation Authority.

In July 2020, the US Federal Aviation Administration downgraded the international safety rating of PCAA to category-2 and subsequently barred Pakistani airlines' operation in the United States.

These actions impacted the Pakistan aviation sector adversely. The blow was particularly painful as air traffic was already reduced due to Covid-19 restrictions. Its worst impact was felt by the national flag carrier PIA, which used to earn 37 percent of its total annual revenue from its UK and EU routes.

Since the folding of PIA operations in those jurisdictions in July 2020, the airlines has cumulatively suffered losses to the tune of approximately PKR 50 billion. A private sector Pakistani airlines which was about to commence its flight operation to the UK, saw its plans scuttled before they could materialise due to the sanctions.

Due to sanctions on PCAA licensing, the pilots and aircraft engineers too suffered, with many losing their lucrative jobs abroad. This resulted in loss of precious foreign exchange. While at home, many had to wait for appearance in licensing examination conducted by PCAA. This extended the process of getting them licensed and subsequent hiring at to the national and international commercial airlines.

ICAO is an international aviation agency which works under the guidelines and funding of the United Nations. In his January 4 letter to DG CAA Khaqan Murtaza, ICAO's Deputy Director Denis Guindon wrote that the committee conducted the audit in December 2021 and "determined that the actions taken by Pakistan had successfully resolved SSC (Significant Safety Concern)." At about the same time, the SSC was also removed from ICAO's website.

Our sources say that PCAA took painstaking measures and work meticulously to pass the ICAO Universal Safety Oversight Audit Programme (USOAP) Continuous Monitoring Approach (CMA) audit that was conducted by a high-level ICAO team in Pakistan from 29 November to 10 December 2021. During the Audit, the team reviewed flight standards, aerodrome

facilities, and licensing processes.

In his letter, Guindon wrote: "During the audit, the committee reviewed the corrective actions taken and related evidence presented by Pakistan to address the SSC regarding the licensing system of the state, specifically in relation to the examinations conducted by the CAA and by delegated or designated training organizations prior to the issuance of licenses and ratings."

He also thanked the PCAA officials for assistance during the audit mission. It also appreciated the active commitment of officers towards achieving the objectives.

As reported previously, the Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority was able to pass the CMA audit successfully. It was highly anticipated since then, that the SSC observation will also be soon lifted.



In a later statement, DG PCAA, declared it a historic milestone for Pakistan and appreciated the efforts of the entire regulatory team behind this success.

The lifting of ICAO's SSC is seen as a great relief for Pakistan's aviation industry. Aviation experts have a positive opinion and a few even foresee it as beginning of PIA re-entry in international arena. Though, there are many who are skeptical and feel that much is still left to do!

While the road is now clear for a return of Pakistani airlines to European and North

American skies, several operational and technical issues still remain unresolved. Our sources in PCAA say that the Civil Aviation Authority may again undergo a short audit by EASA.

Moreover, the CEO PIA has told this correspondent it will take the national flag carrier until March 2022 to resume its international flight operations as airlines bookings have already been completed until February 2022. Two months will be needed by PIA to regain its operational load.

PIA's operation is now greatly focused on ethnic traffic within Pakistan. Prior to the ban, many passengers traveling on foreign routes from PIA were old people on wheelchairs due to its direct flights. Such customers can cause financial issues to an airline if a certain limit to their number is exceeded.

Another problem is that young people do not want to travel by PIA for several reasons including the fact that other carriers provide better facilities on much cheaper tickets. Also, they enjoy stopovers and layovers to glamorous stations such as Istanbul and Dubai.

PIA will have to fight extreme competitors such as Turkish Airlines, Saudi, Emirates, and Qatar Airways. Although several issues persist, the CEO PIA, Air Marshal Arshad Malik is hopeful that PIA will be able to compete despite difficulties.

Something is Better than Nothing

The Green Line BRT is Karachi's first mass transit system in 75 years



After decades of hiatus, Karachiites finally saw their first Bus Rapid Transit (BRT) system go operational in the city as the Green Line BRT formally started its full-blown operations on 10 January with 80 buses.

Sindh Governor Imran Ismail inaugurated the trial of public transport project on 25 December where he termed it a gift for the people of Karachi on Quaid e Azam's Birthday. "It's a big day for Karachiites. It took more than fifteen years for them to have this kind of public transport service. This trend would continue, I hope, and more bus services would be introduced for the people of this city."

The Green Line project began its trial operations with 25 out of the 80 buses plying the routes. Initially, only half the stations were readied and the bus was operating in two separate shifts, morning and evening.

On the occasion, the governor conceded the project was still incomplete and there were a few glitches that he said would be resolved by 10 January when the full-fledged operations commence. According to the Sindh Infrastructure Development Company (SIDCL), buses, stations, and working hours were to be increased once the trial phase completes. However, the issues could not be resolved as of our visit to the bus route on 10 January.

The Green Line project's foundation stone was laid in 2016 by the then Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif at Annu Bhai Park, Nazimabad. It was estimated that the 17.6-km first phase of the project would cost around PKR 16.6 billion and will complete in one year. The system is comprises of twenty-two stations; starting from Surjani and ending at Guru Mandir.

The planned deadlines and budgeted costs could not be met. The cost more than doubled to PKR 35.5 billion and the time

period increased to five years and nine months. The reasons attributed to the inflated cost are rupee devaluation, route changes (which is now increased to twenty-two km), and project delays on part of the administration.

Prime Minister Imran Khan finally inaugurated the oft-delayed project on 10 December. At the time of writing, the range of facilities available is incomplete at fourteen out of twenty-two operational stations including Sakhi Hassan, which is a major stop. As reported by senior journalist Habib Khan, the lifts installed for the handicapped and elderly remain non-functional, making it impossible for them to travel.

What is more, questions are being raised as to the quality of the installed equipment even though the Governor has rubbished them as mere administrative issues rather than arising out of malfunctioning equipment. Finishing work is also incomplete at all stations.

Another concern is that the pedestrians are usually supposed to walk to and from bus stops. However, most stations have encroached upon the footpaths, forcing pedestrians to walk on roads, endangering lives. One example of this kind of encroachment upon footpath is near Numaish Interchange, the last station of Green Line.

Karachi's growing street crime adds further to the worries of BRT commuters. Sometimes even crossing two blocks on foot can become dangerous as people tread the distance to and from BRT stations. Hence, better law and order situation is paramount to the success of the service.

Presently, 900 CCTV cameras have been installed, spread over stations, routes, and buses for monitoring. Journalists were told that a discussion with NADRA was underway to introduce a face recognition system for the commuters. Security guards have also been deployed at all stations.

Phase I of Green Line project ends at Numaish Interchange. There is no clue about when work will begin on the second

phase of the project. The multitude of offices and business centers in Saddar and Tower area are more than five kilometers away from Numaish. This will be an issue for commuters, particularly working women.

The majority of working women in Karachi live in the neighborhoods of North Karachi, Nazimabad, North Naziabad, and Buffer Zone. They will not be able to completely benefit from the service, leaving them again at the mercy of Qingqi rickshaws and minibuses.

The bus company has introduced an automatic ticketing system based on their 'Karachi Breeze Card'. The base fare from one stop to another is PKR 15 with a PKR 5 increase with each additional station. The maximum fare is capped at PKR 55.

Since its inauguration, thousands of people have thronged the mass transit service, some commuting for work while others enjoying some leisure time on the weekends. Many students and women are happy as they only need to travel two to

three stops' distance for their schools, colleges, or grocery rounds.

Of the five BRT lines promised in the 2030 Transport Master plan for Karachi, this is the first to be completed – and the first mass transit system in Karachi in 75 years. With traffic problems exacerbating with each passing day, this is a positive start nevertheless.

However, the Green Line will benefit a mere 135,000 people daily out of the thirty million population of the thriving megapolis. As per the World Bank, ideally, there should be a 100-seater bus for every 1,500 people.

Meanwhile, the Orange Line is still on the drawing board and citizens are starting to question the seriousness of Sindh government, seen paying lip service to the project now and then without any solid progress to show.

Meanwhile, the resilient people of Karachi remain stuck with stopgap solutions like Qingqi rickshaws, dilapidated minibuses, and creaky taxicabs.

By Hamza Qureshi



With Omicron Ascendant, Now is No Time to Drop Our Guard

Why protective measures are more important today than ever to beat back Covid-19



By Noor Aftab

It has been said again and again but it bears repeating today more vociferously than ever: Vaccines and protective measures are our two lines of defense against the dreadful pandemic now in its third year of sweeping the globe.

Sick and tired as we are of wearing facemasks, practicing physical distancing, and washing hands frequently, these are still the best strategies to avoid being infected from Covid-19.

It was a matter of time before the Omicron hit Pakistan – and now our worst fears have been realized: The most virulent variant of Covid-19 is driving a whole new wave of the pandemic in the country.

Omicron has already made headlines by driving unprecedented spikes in number of infections in other countries. Pakistan – with relatively low vaccine coverage – is even more vulnerable.

What is more, even though Omicron so far seems to result in milder symptoms than previous variants, a massive increase in cases can still lead to a major spike in hospitalisations, overwhelming our already beleaguered healthcare system.

Finally, as is abundantly clear by now, there is a limit to how much the government can or will do to save the masses from the deadly bug. It therefore follows that how Pakistan fares in its fight against Omicron depends largely on how responsibly the citizenry responds to the challenge.

Omicron's progress

Much remains unknown about the omicron strain, which was first detected in southern Africa in last November and since has been found in at least two dozen countries. The WHO has urged countries to boost health care capacity

and vaccinate people to fight a surge in Covid-19 cases driven by the new variant.

Omicron has spread very quickly in many countries of the world. Closing borders and travel restrictions have not proven to be effective in preventing country-to-country spread.

Britain, the United States, France and Australia have all announced record case numbers in recent days, while China has imposed lockdowns in two cities and rolled out mass testing for millions as it doubles down on its 'zero-Covid' policy ahead of the Beijing Winter Olympics.

The Asian financial hub of Hong Kong has banned flights from eight nations, including Pakistan, as part of strict new curbs to stem the spread of the new Omicron variant among their population.

Pakistan was quick to restrict inward flights from countries where it had already spread early on when the World Health Organisation (WHO) declared Omicron as a variant of concern – in the event to little avail.

Fifth wave

Pakistan detected its first case of the omicron variant of the coronavirus on 9 December. Now there is clear evidence of a beginning of another Covid-19 wave mainly driven by this new variant. Genome sequencing had detected a growing number of cases of the Omicron variant, particularly in Karachi, Lahore, and Islamabad.

Sindh government is working on a strategy to contain the variant, which has included a partial lockdown of a Karachi neighbourhood after about a dozen Omicron cases were detected in a family. Health authorities have warned that the Omicron variant is also going to cause a surge in the number of Covid-19 cases in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa in coming days.

The National Command and Operation Centre (NCOC) has already confirmed the Omicron-driven fifth wave of Covid-19 has started in Pakistan. The authorities have urged people to get vaccinated and follow Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) to control the virus spread.

The epidemic curve chart data showed 708 cases were recorded in a single day on 3 January – the highest since 30 October when 733 infections were detected.

The apex national Covid-19 body had already taken measures to control the spread of the Omicron variant in the country and announced a massive vaccination plan that starting 1 December.

Federal Minister Asad Umer who heads NCOC has cited examples of the United States, the United Kingdom and South Africa, where Omicron cases have resulted in a significant increase in hospitalisation rates.

Data compiled by NCOC showed that the people who were vaccinated were less affected by the virus. Vaccines are protecting everyone and working well against the Omicron variant. The data also suggested that a combination of widespread immunity and numerous mutations have resulted in

a virus that causes far less severe disease than previous iterations.

Research insights

Similarly, five separate studies conducted by foreign experts suggest that the variant does not attack the lungs as viciously as previous variants. In one study, released as an online pre-print by a large consortium of Japanese and American scientists, hamsters and mice infected with omicron experienced far less lung damage and were less likely to die than those infected with previous variants.



Another study out of Belgium found similar outcomes in Syrian hamsters, which have been known to experience particularly severe illness with previous iterations of the virus. In Hong Kong, scientists studied a small number lung tissue samples from patients collected during surgery and found that omicron grew more slowly in those samples than other variants did.

While omicron may be good at evading the attacks of antibodies, recent studies have also shown that it has far less success avoiding the second-line defenses of vaccines and prior infections: T-cells and B-cells.

Some experts say Covid-19 may be difficult to eradicate, but it will move out of the pandemic phase and into the endemic phase. This means the virus will keep circulating in parts of the global population for years, but its prevalence and impact will come down to relatively manageable levels,

ending up more like the flu than a world-stopping disease.

Vaccinate, vaccinate!

The authorities have ramped up the vaccination campaign and coronavirus monitoring since the emergence of the omicron Covid-19 variant.

About 70 million people in Pakistan, or 32 percent of the population, have had two vaccine doses. Total number of fully vaccinated people is 73,484,322 while vaccine doses so far administered in the country is 161,409,693.

Punjab is leading the way among the provinces by inoculating 68 percent of its eligible population

The government has authorized booster doses for citizens over the age of 30. Children over the age of 12 are also being offered vaccinations at their schools.

The federal government has instructed the provinces and authorities concerned to show a 'zero tolerance' policy regarding an obligatory vaccination regime.

The government has also tightened travel restrictions banning passengers from 15 countries including southern African nations and making Covid-19 testing and vaccination for inbound travelers from Category B countries.

Covid-19 vs Freedom

Are authoritarian societies really better equipped to deal with problems like Covid-19?

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The world today is a completely different world as compared to the world two years ago. The Covid-19 pandemic has profound effects on all aspects of life. The individuals' freedoms have been curtailed throughout the world. This has met resistance from sections of the society in the Western world.

However, the majority of the public has accepted the new norm of restricted freedom for one reason or the other ranging from following the science to safety of own life to safety of others' lives to be a law-abiding citizen to grudgingly accepting to be on the right side of the law.

If we look at the impact of the pandemic, we find that democratic societies have endured more damage from Covid-19 than closed and authoritarian societies. This raises the question about the systems of societal arrangements.

Some people argue that the experience of the pandemic reflects that authoritarian societies are better equipped in dealing with bigger problems as populations are more disciplined to follow the strict rules to overcome the gigantic social problems. The advantage of such an outcome translates into economic, social, and psychological advantages for both the society and individuals.

In this scenario, the losses are limited both in terms of loss of lives and economic loss, as the economy and the social life do not derail significantly at a large scale. The losses can be curtailed to limited areas for limited time. However, this argument favours, directly and indirectly, curtailing individual freedoms.

Curtailment of individuals' freedoms is the downside of this argument though. The real engine of the human development is humans' capacity to be creative and for letting the individuals to be more creative, a society must allow its members to be free thinkers and enjoy the freedom of thought and action. The society reflects the collective wisdom of its members. It is more enriched with more creative people.



The strength of the Western democracy is its capacity to let its individual members to use and expand their intellectual capacity with unrestrained thinking. This way the individuals are more empowered and are entrusted with more resources of production. These resources of production are exploited by the individuals to enrich them and the society at the same time. Therefore, enrichment is at both individual and societal level.

The human potential in terms of discovering knowledge and creativity is infinite. Any society that will allow its members to exploit their potential to the maximum is going to dominate the world. Whether you hate or love America, it allows (a substantial proportion of) its citizens to develop and use their potential to the maximum. This is the secret recipe for the greatness of the United States.

If the US overcomes its race issues and provide equal opportunities to all its citizens right from the day they are born, it will be very difficult for any country to catch up with America in the foreseeable future.

The American model of individual freedom can be adapted by other countries to have their own success. As various societies are governed by their own philosophies, it does not mean that they need to forgo their own way of life. The only thing they need to do is to provide enabling and creative

environment to their members for the enrichment of society in various forms.

Granting and safeguarding human rights and individual freedoms in a law-abiding society is the only sustainable recipe for going forward in future to fight the situations like Covid-19 pandemic and other existential threats to life on the globe as well as raising living standards.

If we look at the history of humanity then Islam stands alone at the top to be the first religion that emphasised and unleashed the individual potential of the people under the greatest guide of the human beings. The common people of Makkah, Medina, and the wider Muslim world became the great rulers, lawgivers, statesmen, generals, reformers, traders, businessmen, jurists, philosophers, Sufi's, mathematicians, astrologers, and what not.

Democracy was enjoined upon Muslims to carry out their collective business. Human equality was ensured in a just society. Islam is a forward-looking religion as it emphasised most on knowledge alongside accepting Islam as religion. The best part is that oriented fundamentally towards human welfare, Islam avoids the ills of capitalism.

This pandemic will end, but it has opened up a new vista to look deeply at what is so rusting in the Islamic world. Pakistan is in a unique position to set examples for the Muslim world to follow.

The Untold Perils Brewing Astride the Durand Line

The absence of modern state institutions in Afghanistan is a source of hazards to the world and particularly to Pakistan



By Umer Farooq

In recent weeks, there have been reports of Afghanistan's Taliban militants removing fencing built by Pakistan on the international border between the two countries – and Pakistan Army shelling Pakistan Taliban hideouts inside Afghanistan causing irritation in the relations between Islamabad and Kabul.

Islamabad have strongly reacted to Afghan Taliban's move to remove fencing from the international border which Pakistani army soldiers constructed in the last five years to restrict the movement of militants and terrorists.

At the heart of this situation is a controversy over the Durand Line, the 2600-kilometer long international border that divides Pakistani territory from Afghan territory.

Pakistan army has a high threat perception of the revival of Pakistani Taliban activity in Afghan territory after the victory of Afghan Taliban in Afghanistan. This has led the Pakistan army to launch military strikes across the

international border against Pakistani Taliban, who have reportedly revived their activities and are in the process of regrouping on Afghan territory. This has set alarm bells ringing in Islamabad.

Taliban, on the other hand, are under pressure from their constituency in Afghanistan and Pakistan not to recognise any international restrictions on their movement across the international border. International wire services quoted an Afghan official as saying that Durand Line divides Pashtun families, clans and tribes into two parts and therefore nobody should be allowed to restrict the movement of these families, tribes and clans across international borders.

The Durand Line was established in 1893 as the international border between British India and the Emirate of Afghanistan by Mortimer Durand, a British diplomat of the Indian Civil Service, and Abdur Rahman Khan, the Afghan Emir, to demarcate the limits of their respective spheres of influence and improve diplomatic relations and trade.

The British considered Afghanistan to be an independent state at the time although they controlled its foreign affairs and diplomatic relations.

The Afghan political consensus maintains that the line was drawn unilaterally, and that it is an artificial demarcation ignoring the geography, topography, population composition of the region or any other factors that are considered when creating borders.

They say the British authorities of the time completely ignored historical perspectives, or the will of the local people, and that the decision was based on geopolitical and geostrategic requirements of the British colonial administration in India. The line a largely Pashtun dominated region between Afghanistan and Pakistan with families, relatives and villages that resided in the same region were now citizens of two different countries with military conflicts lurking in the background.

From Daud to Hekmatyar and Ahmed Shah Masood all who have occupied

the throne of Kabul have always resisted the effort to extend legal legitimacy to Durand Line. Afghan Taliban are no different. Afghan political elite have also questioned the legitimacy of Durand Line. Why would the Taliban now accept it?

Islamabad and Kabul have agreed to resolve the issue of removal of the fence on the international border by local Taliban through diplomatic means.

The controversy over the Durand Line is rooted in history. There is no gainsaying that the modern state of Afghanistan came into existence at the pleasure of two antagonistic empires, Russia and Great Britain, to serve as a buffer zone between them.

It came to pass in the mid-19th century, when the expanding Russian Empire came across the possibility of coming face to face with the British Empire in the lawless tribal expanse in the territory of present day Afghanistan. This security dilemma was resolved with an agreement on the independence of Afghanistan. Thus, Afghan became a buffer state between two empires.

With little resources of its own to meet the expenses of modern bureaucracy and a standing army, the rulers of Afghanistan started to depend on the cash flows and guns from the British Indian Army. Both the Russian Empire and British Indian Empire continued to agree on the independence of Afghanistan as a buffer zone – until the British decided to quit India, leaving behind two independent states of Pakistan and India in its wake.

Even after that, Afghanistan continued to exist as a buffer between the Soviet Empire that had annexed Muslim Central Asia into its fold and American-allied Muslim states in South Asia and South West Asia during the Cold War. Soviet and American Empires continued to cooperate to facilitate the existence of Afghanistan as an independent state during this period.

However, this understanding fizzled out when the Soviets invaded Afghanistan on Christmas Eve in 1979. Superpower cooperation which ensured the independence of Afghanistan gave way to Superpower rivalry and superpower proxy warfare.

This was the end of the Afghan state when

the forces bigger than the state started to operate on its territory. Armed struggle against Soviet occupation turned into a civil war when those fighting soviet forces started fighting each other after Soviet withdrawal.

The Afghan state, however, never succeeded in regaining its former status. Every regional power had a proxy inside Afghanistan to which they were providing weapons, training, finances and intelligence and logistical support. The forces bigger than the Afghan state, which entered its territory in 1979, never withdrew from the unfortunate land.

In 2001, Americans and their western allies occupied Afghanistan and promised the world and Afghan people that they would build a functional state. Americans pumped in trillions of dollars but failed to build a viable state. They finally threw in the towel last year, allowing the Taliban to return to power, who true to the long-time Afghan consensus wasted no time in making known their opposition to the Durand Line.

On its part, the Pakistani military has reacted sharply to this development after some local Afghan Taliban in different parts of the international border tried to remove fence on the international border. “The blood of martyrs has gone into the foundation of these fence and they will be completed” said Pakistani military spokesman while reacting to the incident of Taliban attempt to remove the fence.

For now, Pakistan and Afghanistan have agreed to revolve the border problem with the help of negotiations and diplomatic exchange. However, so far no formal diplomatic exchange has taken place between Islamabad and Kabul.

Pakistani officials have said that after the Pakistani complained to the Kabul authorities no further incident of attempt to remove the fence has taken place on the international border.

Historically, no Afghan government has accepted the legitimacy of Durand Line right from the Daud regime in the 1970 till the Mujahedeen government in the 1990s. Afghans have always questioned the legitimacy of the international border demarcated by the British colonial government in the 19th century.

The Pakistan government has always considered the Durand Line sacrosanct. Diplomatic and military experts are of the opinion that the two capitals of Islamabad and Kabul are on the brink of a military and diplomatic confrontation.

Pakistan's prime threat emanates from Afghanistan – a country in which it is supporting a highly unstable Taliban regime. The Taliban regime, however, has shown reluctance to carry out decisive actions against the source of security threat for Pakistan that is TTP.

Many Pakistani experts say that the Taliban has a fair understanding of how crucial Pakistan's assistance is for the Afghan Taliban to survive. The Taliban regime in Kabul is extremely vulnerable on account of lack of international recognition and lack of capacity to deal with the threats that are emerging on the horizon for Afghan society.

Besides, Taliban's lack of capacity to deal with the military security threats that Afghan society is facing internally, there is a danger of Afghan society dissolving into a big anarchy in the coming months if something is not done immediately to deal with the humanitarian crisis that is lurking in the background.

On both counts Taliban are extremely dependent on Pakistan's state machinery and diplomatic support to sustain itself and to deal with the security threats that Afghan society is facing.

In such a situation it is impossible for the Taliban regime in Kabul to diplomatically take a stern position on Durand Line. The act of local Taliban to remove the fence on the international border with Pakistan reflects the deep-seated wish of Afghan Taliban to do away with the Durand Line in order to embrace their brothers-in-arms who had sheltered them from NATO forces during American occupation of Afghanistan.

However, the Taliban are in dire straits and they do not have the diplomatic space to take a tough position on this question. In the absence of modern state institutions and lacking a modern calculus to assess the military, political and security situation, any goof up could be expected from Taliban.

Are 75 Years of Animosity Enough?

A lookback at Pakistan-India relations in 2021 and a gaze into the prospects for 2022



By Dr. Moonis Ahmar

Except for the renewal of a 2003 ceasefire along the Line of Control (LoC) in Jammu & Kashmir in February 2021, Pakistan-India relations remained stagnant during the previous year. Even the idea to import wheat and cotton from India by Pakistan was rejected by the Prime Minister when he ruled out imports from New Delhi without positive transformation in India's policy on Jammu & Kashmir.

Throughout the year 2021, allegations and counter allegations from both sides further aggravated their relations despite periodic speculations about back channel negotiations.

Why was there a stalemate in Pakistan-India relations during 2021 and what are the prospects of a breakthrough in their ties in 2022? How will the growing Indo-U.S. relations in the wake of American withdrawal from Afghanistan impact Pakistan and how far will Islamabad be able to influence the international community as far as India's blatant violation of human rights in occupied Jammu & Kashmir is concerned?

These are the questions raised by those who are concerned about India's intransigence on J&K and the BJP regime's adamant posture vis-à-vis Pakistan.

While India and Pakistan reiterated adherence to November 2003 ceasefire along LoC, violations along the LoC continued. According to C. Raja Mohan, a renowned Indian journalist writing in the 29 December 2021 issue of *The Indian Express*, India and Pakistan surprised the world in February [2021] by announcing an agreement to renew the 2003 ceasefire that was observed more in breach in recent years.

Although the agreement was formally inked by the two directors general of military operations, it was made possible by backchannel contacts between the Indian security establishment and the Pakistan army leadership. Besides the ceasefire, the two sides also agreed "to address each other's core issues and concerns which have the propensity to disturb peace".

In an environment of pessimism engulfing Pakistan-India relations during 2021,

Pakistan's Chief of Army Staff General Qamar Javed Bajwa has made clear "lasting peace in the sub-continent will remain elusive until the resolution of the Kashmir issue". Speaking at a two-day Islamabad security dialogue held on 18 March 2021, he stressed it was time for India and Pakistan to "bury the past and move forward".

"Our neighbor will have to create a conducive environment, particularly in occupied Kashmir", Pakistan's top general said. "Despite rising security challenges, Pakistan has been one of the few [countries] that has resisted the temptation of involving itself in an arms race."

"This has not been easy, especially when you live in a hostile and unstable neighborhood. But having said that, let me say that we are ready to improve our environment by resolving all our outstanding issues with our neighbors through dialogue in a dignified and peaceful manner."

Unfortunately, India failed to positively respond to overtures from Pakistan for

normalizing relations based on sovereign equality and reversing its unilateral measures of 5 August 2019 when it revoked articles 370 and 35-A, ending special status of J&K. The imposition of lockdown, curfew, siege and search operations, and systematic efforts to change the demography particularly of the Muslim-majority occupied Valley of Kashmir further fanned polarization in Pakistan-India relations.

One can figure out three major ground realities influencing Pakistan-India relations in the recent past with likely repercussions for the year 2022. First, a lack of political will and determination on the part of the two countries to seek an outside-the-box solution of contentious issues as mentioned in the stalled 'composed dialogue' of India and Pakistan.

While crossing the 'red line' on 5 August 2019 by annexing Jammu & Kashmir, India closed doors for plausible negotiations with Pakistan. Periodically, Pakistan Foreign Office has made it clear that without revoking its 5 August 2019 measures, there is no likelihood of resuming dialogue with New Delhi.

On its part, the Modi regime is adamant on the issue of J&K and is not willing to restore the special status of its controlled parts of J&K. So far India has managed popular unrest in the Valley since 5 August 2019 but all Muslim Kashmiri groups from Hurriyat Conference to People's Democratic Party to Jammu & Kashmir National Conference have vehemently rejected revocation of article 370 and 35-A and demand restoration of the special status of J&K.

Yet, New Delhi is confident that it can get away with its dangerous policy by brining the Muslim population of the Valley of Kashmir with development packages.

Another reason for India's heightened intransigence could be that New Delhi feels frustrated and angry that it lost its foothold in Afghanistan after the withdrawal of U.S forces and the imposition of Taliban regime.

Not only did the development sink India's heavy investment in Afghanistan after 9/11, it also dashed Duval's hopes of using that country as a springboard to promote instability in Pakistan in general and in the southern province of Balochistan in particular.

Because of events in Afghanistan, India and the United States are like wounded lions who blame Pakistan for patronizing Afghan Taliban and helped them seize power in Kabul. Like America, India also closed its embassy in Kabul and both are looking for an opportunity to regain their influence in Afghanistan.

Second, during the year 2021, India bore the brunt of pandemic crisis with hundreds and thousands of deaths. Pakistan offered necessary help and assistance to India to deal with the second wave of Coronavirus but was rebuffed by New Delhi.

The Pakistani charity Edhi Foundation also offered India help in coping with Covid-19 by sending a team of volunteers and Ambulances. This gesture of good will was likewise turned down by New Delhi.



Also last year, India rejected Pakistan's proposal to hold a virtual SAARC summit in Islamabad, a move lamented by Pakistan as a deliberate attempt to stall the SAARC process because of its antagonism with Pakistan.

This, then, is the sorry state of Pakistan-India ties as we enter the golden jubilee year of the independence of the two countries. The only silver lining amid this climate of cynicisms and mutual mistrust is that change is the only constant.

Quoting from Raja Mohan's article, "Idealists would want India and Pakistan to mark the 75th anniversary of Independence and Partition by making a fresh bid for durable peace in the subcontinent. Cynics will pour cold water on such

visions by saying India and Pakistan are condemned to at least a "hundred-year war" in the subcontinent.

"Realists, however, say change is the eternal law of the world - for India, and Pakistan, too, the question is not "whether" they will change their approach towards each other, but "when".

"Significant changes are occurring in both countries and in the larger regional and international environment. These are bound to have some impact on India-Pakistan relations that have been frozen stiff for long".

All things considered, it will be a pity that if India and Pakistan are not able to cease this moment of shared jubilation to mend fences on the occasion of golden jubilee of

partition of the sub-continent and their emergence as independent states on 14/15 August 2022.

After seventy-five years of ill will, suspicions, and armed conflict, it is time to say this mutual discord has held more than one billion people of South Asia hostage for long enough. It is time the two countries came together to kick start a process of peace based on resolving contentious issues through a process of viable dialogue.

However, it all depends on how visionary the leadership of the two countries turns out to be - and how courageous in rising above the past to secure our present and future.

(The writer is Meritorious Professor of International Relations and former Dean Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Karachi)

Central Asian Militants Have Afghan Taliban in their Crosshairs

The Taliban win in Afghanistan seems to have inspired rival Islamist militants in neighbouring Central Asian states



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

Taliban's spectacular rise to power in Afghanistan last August inspired Islamist militant groups in the South Asia-Central Asia region to dream big. Now some of these groups of war-hardened fighters are preparing to challenge the de facto rulers of Afghanistan, The Truth International (TTI) can report.

As media in the central Asian countries are mostly under state control, we are not receiving news as it happens. But discussions with analysts and academics from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan for this article have revealed the region is on the boil with a ferment of Islamist militancy.

The repressive nature of the governments in these countries may make these countries fertile recruiting grounds for militants as people disaffected with their respective governments can find no other outlet.

Tajikistan's hostile attitude towards the Taliban in the past, expressed through the patronage of ethnic Tajik Afghan elements against the Pashtun Taliban and now its cosyng up to India, may play into the hands of the militants, creating problems not only for the Taliban but also for Tajikistan itself.

Tajik officials in the recent past have blamed that the Taliban handed over leadership in five districts along the Tajik border in Badakhshan province to Muhammad Sharifov (aka Mehdi Arsalon), leader of an organisation called Ansar-ul-Islam. The alleged move prompted Tajikistan to put its forces on alert and orders deployment of 20,000 troops on the border with Afghanistan for the first time since the Russian jihad.

Badakhshan (Afghanistan) and Gorno Badakhshan (Tajikistan) is an area of

confluence of the borders of Afghanistan, Tajikistan, China, and Pakistan. The Taliban, who have always accused the Tajik government of being anti-Taliban, now suspect the Tajik government is in contact with the anti-Taliban factions.

Temur Umarov, a Central Asian journalist specializing in Central Asian affairs says, "According to some reports, resistance leaders Ahmad Massoud Jr. and Afghanistan's former vice president and self-proclaimed acting president Amrullah Saleh are currently in Tajikistan.

"Dushanbe denies the reports of its support for the National Resistance Front, and says that Ahmad Massoud Jr. simply came to Tajikistan to participate in negotiations with the Taliban that ultimately never took place."

Tajik officials often link terrorist attacks in

Tajikistan to Afghanistan, although, Tajik fighters aligned with ISIS are known to have attacked foreign tourists in Tajikistan on 29 July 2018.

Gulmurod Salimovich Khalimov, the founder of the “Khorasan Camp” in Syria, was once part of the Tajik anti-terror task force. He was trained in the United States to combat terrorism. After spending time in the said force, he fled to Syria and became an ISIS commander.

The presence of Central Asian fighters in the rank and file of the ISIS network around the world today is because of Gulmurod Khalimov.

Despite such strong background of ISIS with Tajikistan, the Tajik officials believe that organisations such as Ansar-ul-Islam could lead to chaos if the Afghan border is not protected.

For some time now, some Afghan Taliban leaders and some representatives of the Tajik government have been trying to clear up misunderstandings between the two countries. Hundreds of ethnic Tajik Afghan families including former Ashraf Ghani government officials have sought refuge in Tajikistan since the Taliban's arrival.

The Afghan refugee crisis too is affecting Tajikistan. Earlier, Tajikistan announced that it has the capacity of hosting 10,000 Afghan refugees but now the authorities are reluctant to accept mainly due to Moscow's security concerns.

The situation is almost the same in Turkmenistan. The Turkmen government has increased security checks on the border with Afghanistan. On 3rd January, after the arrival of the Taliban government, there were reports of firing on the border between the Turkmen army and the Taliban.

Although both sides tried to downplay the news, according to local social worker Abdullah Turkman, an Afghan was killed in the clash. “This is not the first incident of firing on the Afghan-Turkmen border,” he said.

“Some Afghan soldiers crossed the border into Turkmenistan, where drug smugglers often cause shootings, when they cross the border and draw fire from the Turkmen border forces. The Afghan Border Force also returned fire due to a misunderstanding,” Abdullah Turkman said.

Turkmenistan is perhaps the only country in Central Asia that has been safe from terrorism in recent times. Although some of their citizens went to Syria and engaged in fighting there. There is a limited risk of their return to the region.

Turkmen authorities are more worried about the influx of drugs due to the emerging situation in Afghanistan. Besides, they are vested in Afghan peace because of their desire to pave the way for TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) Gas Pipeline Project.

Their overarching objective is to expand the gas pipeline project to India through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Due to this reason, a Turkmen diplomat in Herat held deliberations with the Taliban leader seeking security assurances just two days after the Taliban's arrival.

Another neighbour of Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, is also feeling the heat of extremism. Hundreds of Uzbek fighters reportedly living in Pakistan's tribal areas after 9/11 mounted attacks against the Pakistani army in addition to targeting Pakistani cities. Among these were the ideologues who founded the Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Islamist Jihad Union (IJU).

Journalist and analyst on conflict and development in Uzbekistan, Umida Hashimova also foresees spill-over effects of Afghanistan in the region. She says: “In the past several weeks, the Central Asian countries bordering Afghanistan separately arrested dozens of citizens for their alleged participation in extremist organisations.”

“While such arrests take place regularly in the region, the recent ascent of the Taliban - a previously outcast religious extremist group - to power in Afghanistan arguably influenced individuals in Central Asia with inclinations toward radical thinking. The Taliban's victory likely reanimated some with extremist beliefs and efforts to take action.”

In mid-September last year, two migrant labourers from Tajikistan were arrested in the Krasnoyarsk region of Russia on suspicion of recruiting for a terrorist organisation. The individuals were reportedly members of Katibat al-Tawhid wal Jihad, an ethnic Uzbek group and al Qaeda affiliate active in Syria.

Two days later, the 12-member Hizb-ut-Tahrir cell was arrested in Uzbekistan. The head of the group had contact with and received instructions from a radical “teacher,” an ethnic Uzbek from Kyrgyzstan allegedly in hiding in Ukraine. The group was accused of spreading the idea of establishing a caliphate in Uzbekistan.

Taliban do not pose any imminent threat to Uzbekistan any longer as they do not have a global jihadi agenda. But Islamist State in the Province of Khorasan, an extension of ISIS can be a threat to these regional countries.



Tajikistan and Uzbekistan can be base camps for ISKP and thus can threaten stability in Afghanistan. If ISKP strengthens its network in these two countries, it will take more action against the Taliban in Afghanistan than in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. They can do it by keeping sleeper cells in their home countries while carrying attacks and fighting in Afghanistan.

Like Tajikistan, Uzbekistan too has leaning towards India. The main reason for this is the relations between Russia and India. Since Moscow still has a strong influence on Central Asian countries, India has taken advantage of this opportunity at every level.

Due to the propaganda of Islamist extremism against the Taliban carried out by India, Uzbekistan is also on the list of countries where allegations of suppression of religious sentiments continue. This too will create issues of extremism for these countries in the future.

Will Afghanistan's Taliban Play Ball with the World?

The release of a public intellectual detained for criticising Taliban and talks with northern resistance could be early omens of change



By Haq Nawaz Khan

Beleaguered on every front as they are, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers have shown no clear signs of mending their extreme ways or responding to outside pressure up until now. But two back-to-back but unrelated developments last week could be early omens of the extremist militia slowly waking up to the realities of governing a country in an interconnected world where no country can remain aloof to world opinion and prosper.

In the second of these breakthroughs, the Taliban released Professor Faizullah Jalal, one of the few public intellectuals remaining in the country, whom they had detained earlier in the week for criticising their ways.

"After more than four days of detention on baseless charges, I confirm that Professor Jalal is now finally released!", the elderly academic's daughter Hasina Jalal tweeted on 11 January 2022. His arrest had garnered widespread coverage in the global media and his family was joined by activists from around the world, including Amnesty International, in calling for his release.

Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid tweeted that Jalal had been detained by the Taliban's intelligence arm over statements he made on social media in which he was

"trying to instigate people against the system and was playing with the dignity of the people".

"He has been arrested so that others don't make similar purposeless comments in the name of being a professor or scholar that harm the dignity of others," he added.

Mujahid shared screenshots of tweets he claimed had been posted by Jalal, which said the Taliban intelligence chief was a stooge of Pakistan, and that the new government considers Afghans as "donkeys".

The first of the two breakthroughs that came last week was in the standoff between the Taliban and the National Resistance Front (NRF) as representatives of the two warring sides met in Tehran under the auspices of the Iran authorities. This is the first direct contact between the two sides.

The acting Taliban foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi told media in Kabul on arrival from Iran that a meeting was held with the former veteran Jihadi commander Ismail Khan and Ahmad Massoud, son of the slain Northern Alliance founder Ahmad Shah Massoud and head of the NRF. However, the NRF did not formally confirm or deny the Taliban claims.

"Ahmad Massoud was not in the meeting, but yes as I know a meeting took place in Tehran", a member of the NRF told the The Truth International (TTI). "Veteran Jihadi commander Ismail Khan and Hafiz Mansour, a member of the NRF, attended the meeting." However, he did not share further details of the meeting.

"We have told them to return to the country without any worries", Muttaqi told reporters. "Afghanistan is the home of every Afghan, there should be no issues with them".

If the Taliban reach a peace deal with the NRF, only the Islamic State of Khorasan Province or ISKP will be left a sole security challenge. The overall security situation has improved but there are still scattered incidents of violence across the country.

The hapless Afghans took a sigh of relief when heard of the peace deal between the US-led Western alliance and the Taliban in the beginning of 2020. There were widespread hopes it would bring bloodshed in the country to an end, but those hopes have since been dashed. Although large-scale bloodshed has stopped, normalcy continues to be a distant dream.

When international troops left Afghanistan, it was celebrated by the Taliban and their supporters as a 'major victory' against the world's most powerful nations. Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan also joined the chorus, terming it the breaking up shackles of slavery.

There were expectations of a new broad-based interim government being established to represent every ethnic and political group, but the interim government installed by the Taliban turned out to be a Taliban-only affair. This is one of the reasons why none of the countries of the world has formally recognised the self-proclaimed Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

The international community is pressing the leadership of Taliban to include all groups in the government, without success up until now. Other than a broad-based government, human rights, women participation at the highest level and girl's education are also considered as the hurdles in the way of non-recognition of the Taliban government.

Unlike the past, the international community has not fully disengaged from Afghanistan to avoid a repeat of the 1990s. There is a policy of engagement and some humanitarian assistance, but that equal to none run the country, totally destroyed in the past wars.

Many countries have been playing their influences and role to help the country out of the crisis. The US, China, Russia, Pakistan, Qatar, Turkey and Iran are at the

forefront to help Afghanistan. Pakistan has hosted an extraordinary meeting of the foreign ministers of the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) to make a special fund for Afghanistan.

However, the leadership of the Taliban have been asking the US and other countries to recognise their government and unfreeze their funds. According to reports, the US has frozen some USD 9 billion in Afghan assets held in banks abroad and also suspended USD 8 billion as annual grant.

The common Afghan people are the victims of the prevailing situation. People have been passing through the worst economic conditions and humanitarian crisis. The International trade is at almost zero, employees are not getting salaries, unemployment is at the highest and thousands of skilful Afghans have either left the country or trying to leave.

The Taliban is also facing the issue of trust deficit and the people are concerned about their lives. Freedom of speech is considered as a crime and people who are raising a voice against Taliban policies or criticising the group have been either picked up or tortured.

Another challenge is of Pakistani Taliban or the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan presence in Afghanistan, and its attacks inside Pakistan. Pakistan has been asking the Afghan Taliban to either neutralise the Pakistani militant group or press them for peace talks, and if the group is not ready to

talks, then stern action should be taken against them.

However, Afghan Taliban facilitated several meetings between the TTP and Pakistani representatives last year and a month long ceasefire was also agreed, but it could not have been extended. Since December 9, TTP had intensified their militant activities inside Pakistan.

TTP had been a long-time ally of the Afghan Taliban and also showing allegiance to the Chief of the Afghan Taliban Sheikh Haibatullah Akhunzada, now it is a challenging task for the Afghan Taliban to fight them or send them back to Pakistan. The foot soldiers of Afghan Taliban have been pressing their leadership to avoid use of force against the Pakistani militants or Pakistani refugees.

Reports say some of the TTP fighters are in contact with Daesh people in Afghanistan, and if the Afghan Taliban launched an offensive against the TTP, there is a fear that some of the fighters and commanders may join Daesh to fight the Afghan Taliban. Efforts are still underway to resolve this issue peacefully.

If the Pakistani militants continue to carry out their militant attacks from across the Durand Line, it could become a serious threat to the bilateral relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan and Afghanistan relations have been shaky in the past but were hoped to improve when the Taliban took over Kabul.



Robert Kaplan: How will American power be tested in 2022?



By Shahmir Niazi

In a wide-ranging interview published on January 6 as part of The Economist Asks podcast, Robert Kaplan, a leading geopolitical thinker and the author of “The Revenge of Geography” discussed how American power will be tested in 2022.

Host Anne McElvoy posed tons of questions relating to a raft of foreign-policy challenges confronting the U.S., to Kaplan; from the situation in Taiwan to the heated standoff over Ukraine; growing Russia-China ties to the U.S.-China “cold war”; and domestic polarization in the U.S.

Beginning with the question of how geography informs foreign-policy, Kaplan, whose work is largely centered around geography, explained citing Taiwan as an example. “It [Taiwan] is roughly a hundred miles off the coast of mainland China. If the Taiwan strait was only the width of the English Channel; being about 20 miles off the coast of China, [Beijing] would’ve invaded and conquered Taiwan decades ago. But that extra eighty miles presents a whole gamut of military and logistical challenges to make

it an extremely difficult proposition for China to very easily, quickly, militarily incorporate Taiwan.”

Kaplan later drew a parallel between Taiwan and West Berlin of the Cold War. He argued that if it ever became achievable that the US could not or would not protect Taiwan, then countries in Asia, from Japan to Australia in the south, and certainly Singapore, will make side deals with China. He furnished his point by asserting that China is the quite organizing principle of Asia in an economic, demographic, and geographical sense.

Upon being asked whether the intense superpower rivalry over Taiwan leads him to think that the U.S. may consider an armed conflict or even an outright war with China in the future, Kaplan responded in the affirmative. He said, “the pentagon sees China as “the pacing power”; the number one threat facing the U.S. Hence, military action by the U.S. over Taiwan cannot be discounted.

Similarly, the policy of “strategic ambiguity” designed for the early 1970s when the U.S. and China agreed to disagree on the Taiwan issue so that they could combine forces against the Soviet Union is no longer viable in today’s world. “No foreign policy solution or very few are designed to last half a century,” he said.

Shifting focus towards eastern Europe, the host asked Kaplan about the unfolding Ukraine crisis and seeks his opinion in the context of its geographical location. Describing it as being enveloped from three sides with no natural borders with Russia, Kaplan argued that since historically Ukraine has remained a part of the Soviet and the Romanovs empire, Russia will always care more about Ukraine than Western Europe or the United States ever will. Vladimir Putin’s latest stationing of thousands of troops with its border with Ukraine points to the willingness of Russia to spend more resources and take greater risks than its adversaries so that it does not join NATO or the European Union. “The

best outcome for Ukraine, given its geography and its history is a sort of successful Finlandization,” he said.

While supporting his argument, Kaplan explains Putin’s actions as a part of a larger plan to reestablish the Soviet Empire, informally; a soft zone of Russian imperial influence. “What he [Putin] might do is: take out another slice of eastern Ukraine and say I dare you [the West] what will you do. NATO may move some forces into central-eastern Europe but how much can they help Ukraine?” he asked.

At this point, Anne McElvoy drew the attention of Kaplan towards the growing Russia-China ties over the past few years. They have recently held joint military exercises too. “I think it will have a great impact because it essentially freezes the United States (strategically speaking) out of Eurasia,” the foreign policy expert said while adding that Henry Kissinger and Richard Nixon could pry China away from the Soviet Union, as China needed a respite – it needed an improved relationship with the United States but Russia does not need that anymore. “There is nothing we can give Russia or Putin that would satisfy him to pull away from a closer relationship with China,” he argued.

Similarly, the idea of taming Russia and diluting its ties with China through economic tools at the U.S.’ disposal, pushed forward by the host was dismissed. Robert reasoned that “Putin can only go so far. He has not been challenging China in Central Asia and seems to be comfortable with Chinese economic domination of the former Soviet space. He doesn’t like being a second or a little brother to China but the fact that he doesn’t like it doesn’t mean he can’t live with it. If it means pulling up a solid block against the West because he knows that the West wishes him no good. It wishes he were gone in some way or another whereas China doesn’t think that way.” Hence, the geopolitical analyst concluded that it would take extraordinarily creative diplomacy integrated with economic policy to pry Putin away from China.

Following up with a reference to Kaplan’s frequent usage of the term “cold war” to describe the tussle between the U.S. and China, when asked the likely course of the confrontation, he dived deep into the underlying divisions guiding policy in both the countries: “Yes, I call the US-China struggle a cold war but in the lower-case sense of the word. It’s not like the “Cold War. The United States is bent on exporting, if not democracy in the legalistic sense, at least

civil society, fighting corruption, a lot of the building blocks that do make up democracy. Whereas, China has shown a proclivity to get along with any kind of regime. It will work with anyone provided that anyone has natural resources or is in a geographical position conducive to China’s desires.”

Finally, the interviewer inquired about how domestic issues in the American system guide foreign policy, especially against the backdrop of the January 6 insurrection on Capitol Hill. Describing the foreign policy as the foreign extension of a domestic situation, Kaplan said, “If the domestic situation is fraught if it becomes more extreme, that’s going to affect foreign policy in a negative sense because both major parties see foreign policy in terms of their own ideology.”

Kaplan argued that American foreign-policy practitioners today had to operate in a difficult environment where the U.S. no longer possesses the kind of influence it used to have. There is a rise of postcolonial thinking where leaders of say Ethiopia or South Africa do not have to follow the leader of either the Kremlin or Washington.” The power of that class of countries like the UAE, Turkey, and Iran did not exist during the Cold War, he added.



Erdogan's Israel Gambit

Are Turkey's recent overtures towards Israel transactional or strategic?

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Turkey's cosying up to Israel is an interesting development for international relations observers. For critics, it signals Ankara's reluctance to pursue the Palestinian cause and adopt a path parallel to the Abraham Accords of 2020 chosen by some of its Arab neighbours.

Supporters however, believe that the move is indicative of Erdogan's balancing act in the Middle East where championing legitimate causes for self-determination does not necessarily preclude a workable relationship with the Naftali Bennett government.

The question for most, however, is: Which of the two scenarios depicts the situation more aptly? Most analysts consider neither of the two tells the whole story.

On 22nd December 2021, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan in a meeting with Turkey's Jewish community and the Alliance of Rabbis in the Islamic States (ARIS) said that relations between the two countries were vital for peace and stability in the region.

At the same time, his stance had tinge of realism as he hinted at envisioning the Middle East where peace and stability prevailed and where diverse religions, languages, and ethnicities could peacefully coexist.

On the external signalling argument, most would argue it was aimed at detracting from the domestic state of the economy where the Lira continues to plummet to alarming proportions and poverty rates in Turkey skyrocket.

Protests in Istanbul took place where the Lira clocked more than 13 to the greenback in a week – losing nearly 30 percent last month alone and around 43 percent over the year. The Central Bank has been incredibly active and slashed the main interest rate by 400 basis points.

However, the President has attempted to absolve himself of responsibility by



rejecting policies which are condemning Turks to unemployment, hunger, and poverty. The war of economic interdependence has been on and Turkey continues to sink.

In Israel, most realists and scholars of political science acknowledge that to divert attention from serious economic problems, countries often look towards foreign policy arrangements which satisfy their international constituencies.

Take the US proclivity towards containing China for example where the latter's relatively better performance in the absence of a democratic model of governance has prompted the Biden and the Trump administration to adopt policies such as tariff wars and clampdown on Chinese companies operating within the United States.

On the rapprochement front, amiable ties between Pakistan and India have an economic dimension and the more economic interdependence exists between states, the less inclined towards conflict they would be despite bellicose rhetoric emanating from capitals.

In Israel and Turkey's case the diplomatic relationship has been a whirlwind of disagreements, potential areas of cooperation, and flashpoints over the Gaza flotilla raid of 2010 and the war in Gaza in 2020 which resulted in a rupture in diplomatic ties.

Still, these variables have not prevented Israel and Turkey from assuming a normal relationship. According to Erdogan himself, Turkey's relationship with Israel has been blossoming in the economy, trade, and tourism sectors despite differences on Palestine where Bennett's administration is construed to have a constructive and sincere stance towards peace in the Middle East.

Optimism exists in Ankara that a solution will eventually be found in Jerusalem which will cater the needy various faiths in the region and any approach that marginalizes other faiths would be detrimental to what Erdogan believes is Turkey's ambivalence to anti-Semitism, exemplified in the 1492 embracement of Jews who fled the inquisition and co-hosting the International Holocaust Remembrance Day resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly.

Those who do understand the vagaries of international relations, however, would also acknowledge that a breakdown in peace with a crackdown in Gaza by the Israeli Defence Forces in 2022 may necessitate a rethink in Ankara over rapprochement with Israel. Which brings the point that this latest bonhomie is temporary and subject to an array of different interpretations.

End Times: A Muslim Perspective

Islamic eschatology may be similar to those of other Abrahamic faiths, but there are important differences

By Azmat M Saqib

(PART 2)

Narrations of the Prophet (peace be upon him, PBUH) are known as Ahadith, plural of Hadith. The Ahadith mentioned in this part and the next one are from the compilation “Mishkaat Sharif, Kitab ul Fitun”, the book pertaining to the turmoil and portents of the Last Hour.

Different viewpoints exist among Muslim scholars regarding sequence of happenings in the End Times. One sequence is listed below:

- I. Appearance of Al Mahdi in Makkah.
- II. An army dispatched from Syria to crush Al Mahdi.
- III. Sinking of that army in earth between Makkah and Medina.
- IV. Al Mahdi and his army fight a great war against Romans.
- V. After defeating the Romans, Mahdi’s army conquers Constantinople.
- VI. Dajjal (Antichrist) will appear on earth and surround them in Damascus.
- VII. Descent of Jesus Christ from Heaven in Damascus.
- VIII. Escape of Dajjal from Damascus and his killing by Jesus Christ at the gate of Ludd.
- IX. Just rule of Al Mahdi for seven years and his death.
- X. The ransacking of lands by Gog and Magog.
- XI. Miraculous killing of Gog and Magog by insect bites.
- XII. Removal of dead bodies by large birds, and cleansing of the earth by heavy rains afterwards.
- XIII. Establishment of a just and prosperous global order under Jesus Christ.
- XIV. Death of Jesus Christ and elimination of all the believers by blowing of a sweet wind.
- XV. Blowing of the two trumpets.
- XVI. Onset of the Day of Reckoning (Last Hour)

Ahadith describing the above events are narrated in this article.

Al Masih Al Dajjal (the Antichrist)

1. There is never a Prophet who has not warned the Ummah of that one-eyed liar; behold he is one-eyed and your Lord is not one-eyed. On his forehead are the letters k.f.r. (kafir).

— as reported by Anas b. Malik



2. Dajjal is blind of left eye with thick hair and there would be a garden and fire with him and (in actual) his fire would be a garden and his garden would be fire.

— as reported by Hudaifa

3. He would be a young man with twisted, contracted hair, and a blind eye. I (Prophet, PBUH) compare him to Abd-UI-Uzza b. Qatan. He who amongst you survive to see him should recite over him the opening verses of Sura Kahf (Cave). He would appear on the way between Syria and Iraq and would spread mischief right and left. O servant of Allah! Adhere (to the path of truth).

We said: Allah’s Messenger, how long would he stay on earth? He said: For forty days, one day like a year, one day like a month, one day like a week and rest of the days would be like your days.

We said: Allah’s Messenger, would one day’s prayer suffice for the prayers of day equal to one year? There upon he said: no, but you must make an estimate of time (and then observe prayer). We said: Allah’s Messenger, how quick would he walk upon the earth?

Thereupon he said: like cloud driven by wind. He would come to the people and invite them (to a wrong religion) and they would affirm their faith in him and respond to him. He would then give command to the sky and there would be rainfall upon the earth and it would grow crops.

Then in the evening, their pasturing animals would come to them with their humps very high and their udders full of milk and their flanks stretched. He would then come to another people and invite them. But they would reject him and he would go away from them and there would be drought for them and nothing would be left with them in the form of wealth.

He would then walk through the wasteland and say to it: Bring forth your treasures, and the treasures would come out and collect (themselves) before him like the swarm of bees. He would then call a person brimming with youth and strike him with a sword and cut him into two pieces

and (make these pieces lie at a distance which is generally) between the archer and the target. He would then call (that young man) and he will come laughing with his face gleaming (with happiness).

— as reported by Abu Nawas b. Sam'an

4. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: there would be no land which would not be covered by the Dajjal but Makkah and Medina and there would be no passages out of the passages leading to them, which would not be guarded by angels arranged in rows. Then he (the Dajjal) would appear in a barren place adjacent to Medina and it would rock three times that every non-believers and hypocrite would get out of it towards him.

— as reported by Anas b. Malik

5. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: The Dajjal would be followed by seventy thousand Jews of Isphahan (Iran) wearing Persian shawls.

— as reported by Anas b. Malik

Allah's Messenger said: There would be no creation (creating more trouble) then the Dajjal right from the creation of Adam to the Last Hour.

— as reported by Abu Qatada

Al Mahdi (the rightly guided one)

1. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: Al Mahdi would be from my progeny, i.e., from the offspring of Fatima (peace be upon her).

— as reported by Umme Salma

2. He would have broad forehead, high nose, he will fill the earth with justice, as it was filled with tyranny, and will rule the earth for seven years.

— as reported by Abu Saeed Khudri

3. A person will come to Mahdi and ask for bounty, and Mahdi will fill his both hands with enormous riches.

— as reported by Abu Saeed Khudri

4. Allah's Messenger said: There would be dispute among the heirs after the death of a caliph (king). A person will escape Medina and take refuge in Makkah. People of Makkah will bring him out of hiding, and between Hajr-e-Aswad (the black stone) and Maqam e Ibrahim (station of Abraham), they will give allegiance to his leadership. An army from As-Sham (greater Syria) will be dispatched to crush him. But this army would be sunk in the earth at 'Baida', a place between Makkah and Medina.

— as reported by Umme Salma

5. Allah's Messenger Said: Mahdi's rule will have abundance of rain, and the earth's fertility will give enormous crops. Abundance and affluence will make people wish that the dead would have been alive and share the joy. He will rule for seven or nine years.

— as reported by Abu Saeed Khudri

Description of the great war (the so-called Armageddon)

1. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: The Last Hour will not come until the Romans would land at A'maq or in Dabiq (situated in Syria near Turkish border). An army consisting of best (soldiers) of the people of the earth at that time will come from Medina. When they will arrange themselves in ranks, the Romans would say: do not stand between us and those (Muslims) who took prisoners from amongst us. Let us fight with them, and the Muslims would say: Nay, by Allah we would never get aside from you and from our brethren that you may fight them. They will then fight and a third of the army would run away, whom Allah will never forgive. A third (of the army) which would be constituted of excellent martyrs in Allah's eye, would be killed and a third who would never be put to trial would win and they would (also) be conquerors of Constantinople.

— as reported by Abu Huraira

2. The enemy shall muster strength against Muslims and the Muslims muster strength against them. I said, you mean Rome? And he said: yes, and there would be a terrible fight and the Muslims would prepare a detachment (for fighting unto death) which would not return but victorious. They will fight until night will intervene them; both the sides will return without being victorious and both will wipe out.

The Muslims will then prepare a detachment for fighting unto death so that they may not return but victorious. When it would be the fourth day, a new detachment out of the remnants of the Muslims would be prepared and Allah will decree that the enemy should be routed.

And they would fight such a fight the like of which would not be seen, so much so that even if a bird were to pass their flanks, it would fall down dead before reaching the end (there would be such a large scale massacre) that when counting would be done, (only) one out of a hundred men related to one another would be found alive.

So what can be the joy at the spoils of such war and what inheritance would be divided! They would be in this very state that they would hear of a clarity more horrible than this. And a cry would reach them: The Dajjal has taken your place among your offspring. They will, therefore, throw away what would be in their hands and go forward sending ten persons as a scouting party.

Allah's Messenger said: I know their names and the names of their forefathers and the colour of their horses. They will be the best horsemen on the surface of the earth on that day.

— as reported by Yusair b. Jabir

(To be continued.)

They Will Rise Again

Saudi Arabia's goodbye to Wahabism is an omen of the things to come in the Gulf region



By Rana Azam

Change is afoot in Saudi Arabia and it seems to be positive. With the loosening of the stranglehold of theocracy, the notoriously conservative Saudi society is moving towards relative openness.

In particular, women are being allowed more of a role in social life. They now have better access to education and business opportunities. They can travel independently and drive. With the lifting of the official decree that made the use of abaya and hijab compulsory, the rigid dress code for women is falling by the wayside.

Most importantly, this is not a case of cosmetic change by executive decree. Due care is being taken to lay the ideological groundwork for change. The discontinuation of the state's century-old embrace of Wahabism and a resolution not to align it with any particular interpretation of Islam including the Hambali School are important ideological advances.

These changes are also important because they have repercussion not only for the Saudi society but also for the wider Muslim world. Discord between the various denominations of Islam will ease, paving the way for greater inter-denominational harmony – provided of course the reforms continue.

This is an important proviso because there is no telling when the palace intrigues that are the hallmark of undemocratic systems may upset the applecart, especially at a time of such tectonic shifts – although the government's grip of the state and society, underpinned by state-of-the-art surveillance technologies, is ruthless.

Saudi Arabia enjoys ascendancy over other Muslim countries and societies for a variety of reasons. Being oil-rich, the kingdom sits on a huge stash of petrodollars, which allows it to throw its weight around in the Muslim world.

This is why the kingdom was able – as crown prince Muhammad bin Salman has conceded – to export the Wahabi ideology through mosques, seminaries, and other means at the behest of the United States during the Cold War era.

The second pillar of Saudi ascendancy in the Muslim world is the kingdom and its rulers being the Custodians of the Two Holy Mosques. The third is the regional policeman's role assigned to it by the US, while the fourth is its association with Sunni Islam, the dominant faction of Islam. Together, these four advantages make Saudi Arabia the leader of the Muslim world.

The Cold War was a confrontation between the Soviet-led Communist bloc and the US-led Western bloc. Russia's socialist revolution of 1917 led by Vladimir Lenin took place while World War I was still raging. Also called the October Revolution, it created the conditions for the creation of Soviet Union.

Barely two decades following WWI came WWII, which saw the Soviet Union emerge even stronger. On the other hand, the United States emerged from this war as the undisputed leader of the capitalist world. The stage was set for the onset of Cold War.

Today, American imperialism is squaring up to start a similar cold war with China – as evidenced by Washington’s employment of trade war tactics and a concerted propaganda campaign epitomized by the recent Democracy Summit. Religion card may not be available this time around, as it has already backfired.

In any case, the original Cold War was the petri dish used by the American imperialism to cultivate the violent side of Islam, with active connivance of Saudi Arabia, as part of its agenda to make the Muslim world impregnable to Soviet influence. In return for this connivance, America undertook to guarantee Saudi security.

This was the context for President Donald Trump’s claim that Saudi Arabia cannot survive a week without American security guarantees, which promoted the Saudi crown prince to issue the statement referenced above. Apparently, the Saudis have now decided to discontinue the said policy.

An important question to ask at this point is what new circumstances have emerged to dissuade the Saudis from their century-old Wahabi ideology. Now may be a good time to remember Karl Marx, whose Historical Materialism provides a scientific means to understanding social change.

Marx holds forth that every social change is rooted in a society’s material needs. The material need in this particular context would be stagnating productivity. This is not to say the superstructure of the society including politics, culture, arts, learning and literature, spirituality, etc., have no role in the progression of regression of a society.

The drift is that development continues as long as the productive faculties of a society are in accord with its social dynamics, but stagnation sets in as soon as this harmony is disrupted. This is precisely the situation petrostates like Saudi Arabia, Qatar, UAE, etc. find themselves in today.

Their oil reserves are dwindling anyway. However, the world around them is suddenly cognizant how the use of hydrocarbons has wreaked havoc on the environment and jeopardized the very future of humanity. As a result, global economy is migrating to greener sources of energy and the demand for fossil fuels is on course to dry up.

Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries thus face the challenge of transforming their economies to weather this shock. Also, the younger Arabs and in particular the younger Saudis, are not the Bedouin of yesteryears who could be herded around at will.

Every year, fresh cohorts of youth equipped with modern education from domestic and Western universities join the labor force. They need employment opportunities and a modern lifestyle, none of which is possible under the archaic social structures and rule by decree still prevalent in these countries.

This clearly means that stage-managed top-down modernization of the kind Saudis are enacting is unlikely to work under dynastic rule. The people need political freedom and democratic rights.

Historically speaking, it is true that political ferments in the region, from the Iranian revolt against monarchy or the more recent Arabian Spring, have come to nothing. The general trend has been of people’s hopes being dashed in the face of deeply entrenched anti-people interests.

Yet, public consciousness in all these countries has indubitably grown through these experiences, and so has their hunger for freedom and democracy, which cannot fail to surface eventually in one form or another. It is a matter of time before people rise again and take their destiny in their own hands.

The writer belongs to Awami Workers Party.



Broadband for All? Yes Please!

Elon Musk's Starlink could underpin Pakistan's long awaited digital revolution, but is Pakistan ready?



By Amna Shoaib

Pakistan's knowledge economy dream hinges on reliable broadband internet access – something our successive governments have been unable to deliver for some odd reason. Can Prime Minister Imran Khan succeed where his predecessors have failed?

In January 2021, the Ministry of Information Technology and Telecommunication published the first draft of a national broadband policy. National Broadband Policy-2021 targeting digital economy contribution to the tune of USD 5 billion in investment and USD 20 billion revenue by 2025.

But this was not Pakistan's first broadband policy. That honor belongs to an earlier document published in November 2004. However, neither that earlier policy nor the new draft seem to have made much of a headway in delivering the goods: Reliable and affordable broadband internet access across Pakistan.

The 2004 policy identified some barriers to broadband growth in Pakistan – starting with price. Broadband subscription prices in Pakistan at that time were 60 times more expensive than in South Korea in nominal terms, and a staggering 1600 times more expensive after

taking purchasing power into account.

Another key barrier was the last mile access. The issues cited under this connection were low quality, small-scale HFC networks; quality issues with the copper beyond 1.5 km from the exchange; and allocation and availability of frequency bands for BWA according to the ITU standards.

Finally, there was the lack of locally created and local language content and applications.

Satellite broadband is the emphatic answer to all those problems. The draft new policy appears to take this into account when it says, "With the changing role of satellite in the provision of broadband service, and in anticipation of new broadband satellite systems, there are important policy challenges to be considered.

"As satellite based broadband services continue to evolve and economize, it presents a new array of opportunities for policy makers and regulators to provide an enabling environment for improving accessibility and inclusion especially in rural and remote areas nationwide.

"For achieving desirable results in relation with the National Broadband Targets considering that more than 60%

of the population resides in rural areas, it is empirical to find the right combination of complementary technologies to bridge the digital divide.

"Satellite technology, fiber optic cables, and terrestrial microwave systems are not mutually exclusive, competing technologies, but together form the inventory to be used for the design, implementation and operation of broadband systems needs to be optimized from spectrum standpoint in light of international commitments."

In an indication that time may finally be ripe for Pakistan to overcome all the barriers referenced above, Elon Musk's global satellite broadband provider Starlink has set its sights on the Pakistani market.

In mid-December, a Starlink delegation headed by the company's Middle East & Asia Director Ryan Goodnight and including its head of global site acquisition Ben Macwilliam met with Federal Minister of Information Technology and Telecom Syed Amin-ul-Haque and IT Secretary Dr Sohail Rajput.

Starlink is a satellite internet constellation operated by SpaceX offering satellite Internet access to most of the Earth. The constellation has grown to

over 1700 satellites through 2021. In December alone, two SpaceX rocket flights put 100 Starlink satellite into orbit. The constellation will eventually consist of many thousands of mass-produced small satellites in low Earth orbit (LEO), which communicate with designated ground transceivers.

SpaceX intends to provide connectivity to underserved areas of the planet, as well as to offer competitively priced service in more urbanized areas. While the Starlink constellation covers most of the global population, actual service can be delivered only in countries that have licensed SpaceX to provide service.

As of November 2021, the beta service offering was available in 22 countries, most of them in North America and Europe.

As part of its plan to launch Starlink's satellite broadband internet service in Pakistan, a local subsidiary of the company, Starlink Pakistan, has already been registered and, is expected to open its office in Pakistan soon.

This will be the first Starlink operation in South Asia. SpaceX has also shown interest in SoT (Space of Things) and IoT (Internet of Things) setup in Pakistan. The Starlink

delegation discussed the plan with the Minister.

The Minister broadband demand in Pakistan was on the rise with 40,000 schools and SMEs poised to scale up their digital presence. He said broadband connectivity was attractive as it enhanced penetration in unserved and underserved areas.

As of November, Pakistan had 107 million broadband subscriptions. The country saw a 52 percent increase in broadband data usage during 2020. In 2021, the country's fixed broadband penetration stood at 1.6 percent, with 2.9 million fixed broadband subscribers and Fiberization Density Index at 0.56 km/1000 inhabitants.

The Starlink delegation was briefed about Balanced Space Satellite Regime of Pakistan, which will facilitate the satellite services.

On the occasion, Mr Haq expounded the Ministry's vision of "Broadband for All". He said it was aligned with the Digital Pakistan vision of Prime Minister Imran Khan. He said it was aimed at widespread usage of internet in public sector, particularly the education sector.

The team also visited Pakistan Telecommunication Authority chairman Amir Azeem

Bajwa, who assured it of PTA's support in line with regulatory framework for Starlink's operations in Pakistan.

Starlink's Pakistan plans dovetail nicely into Prime Minister Imran Khan's Digital Pakistan Vision, unveiled in December 2019, aiming to enhance connectivity, improve digital infrastructure, increase investment in digital skills, and promote innovation and tech entrepreneurship.

As part of his push to bolster Pakistan's digital economy credentials, the Prime Minister has appointed a 17-member task force on IT and telecommunications, responsible for advising policy changes and developing strategic plans to strengthen the tech ecosystem.

The government has already assigned MoITT the task of planning and directing IT programs. National IT Board, a department of MoITT has the mandate to initiate e-government programs at federal ministries as part of 'Digital Transformation'.

All in all, the groundwork for transformation is pretty much in place, and Starlink's arrival at this opportune moment may just be the final piece of the puzzle. The question, however, remains, is the government ready to seize this opportunity?



Make 2022 Your Year to See the World

If all the lockdowns and restrictions have primed you to break free, try some of these fine holiday destinations



After such a stressing 2021, with subsequent Covid-19 waves bringing the world to a standstill – everyone deserves a break! And 2022 was supposed to be all about that. Who would have thought that in the new year, the world would once again be at the behest of another highly transmissible variant, Omicron, disrupting lives, economy and nearly every corner of the globe?

The good news, however, is that this time around, most governments are not so much concerned with the spread – not only because Omicron’s symptoms are milder but also because many countries have achieved quite broad vaccination coverage.

Also, after two years of intermittent lockdowns, authorities everywhere feel pushed to prioritise economic considerations above lockdowns. So, why not travel to your favourite destination – while taking all precautionary measures – as lockdowns remain out of the Covid-19 equation?

There are numerous incredible hotels opening in the new year, with a few having undergone a soft launch in

2021. To facilitate your travel, we have compiled a list of the top hotels to look out for in 2022.

For a starter let’s look at some of the exceptionally beautiful far-flung island retreats in Maldives, Turks and Caicos, Indonesia and Mozambique.

Le Méridien, Maldives latest addition to an array of luxury resorts, ever since its launch in 2019 has mesmerized tourists with its overwater bungalows and multi-bedroom beach houses. Add to that the pristine tropical forests surrounding the hotel, and you get the perfect holiday retreat.

Plus, USD 550 per night isn’t too much to ask if the hotel offers you six multicuisine restaurants, a spa, and a state-of-the-art kid’s club to keep the small humans in the party occupied while you enjoy a calming view.

Toward South East Asia, a new resort concept is taking shape. Indonesia is all set to inaugurate Buahan, a Banyan tree escape in 2022. Nestled in a jungle, surrounded by rice paddies, Buahan is a unique hotel. The rates start at USD 550. According to the owner, it’s a “no

walls, no doors” concept to allow tourists a truly natural “jungle” experience where they can enjoy peaceful moments with family and friends.

If the Buahan is not for you, the Rock House in Turks and Caicos, will surely make you feel at home with its Mediterranean-inspired cottages. Opening come spring, Rock House is poised to become the largest and most luxurious resort of Turks and Caicos, with its private beach, lush green trails, and a 100-foot infinity pool. Per night charges start from USD 665.

Up for some African tourism? The all-new Kisawa resort located on the southern edge of Bengueria Island in Mozambique, should be your go-to place. With its 22 isolated bungalows spread over a vast 300-hectare expanse – Kisawa offers you the perfect blend of privacy and comfort. Bookings rates start from USD 5,625. The cost is justified by the vast range of services offered to tourists.

The Reykjavic EDITION, a luxury lifestyle hotel launched in November last year is all-set to host you for your next holiday retreat to Iceland. The

5-star hotel's central location places it as a jumping off point for visiting tourist hotspots like the Blue Lagoon and the Northern Lights. With its 253 modern rooms, Reykjavic offers ample space for visiting tourists – and that too at a rate of just USD 540.

If you are a fan of cold climates, we have some great news! Norway is launching a new hotel, Sommerro in September 2022. It is not some ordinary hotel but one that offers you a unique opportunity to experience the 19th century architecture that the oldest neighbourhood of Oslo offers. Apart from the 242 rooms, there will be ample communal spaces such as a rooftop pool (Oslo's first), a plant-filled café, and a Nordic-Japanese restaurant to satisfy your Pan-Asian food cravings. The best part is, the rates start at a mere USD 230!

In late 2022 there is another great resort opening – this time in the storied Greece. The hotel, One&Only Aesthesis, without doubt qualifies for that name owing to its rich amalgamation of modern luxury with ancient mid-century high ceilings. Situated at a short distance from Athens, this 127-room beachfront getaway offers great views of the coastal forest.

For thrill seekers and adventure lovers, Argentina has recently launched Explora El Chaltén, a beautiful resort offering a rich blend of serenity and spectacular views. Spread over a large area, tourists will be able to undertake exclusive trekking expeditions – included in the package which starts from USD 917. Although the rooms are minimalist, the beauty lies within the surroundings.

Another great addition to the hospitality industry is the Montage Big Sky, a luxury five-star resort launched in Montana in December 2021. The USD 400 million hotel's primary attraction is its ski-in, ski-out access to Big Sky's world class slopes. Other facilities include live barbecue restaurant, bowling alley and a 10,000 sq. ft. alpine spa. For a world-class lodging experience, USD 676 per night is not too much to ask either.

If you believe in the sixth sense, let it guide you to your next holiday destination. The Six Senses, Ibiza, spread over 20 acres offers you a place to sit back and relax while the Balearic Ocean mesmerizes you with its tranquillity – but that is not all: The resort has a state-of-the-art spa for taking your spiritual well-being to just another level. What more can you ask for USD 570?

Last but not the least, two boutique hotels, one in the midst of Burgundy's fabled vineyards and the other in Charleston, South Carolina have added colours to the hospitality industry. With COMO Le Montrachet scheduled to open in 2022, France looks set to once again up the ante for hospitality industry worldwide.

COMO offers 31 luxury rooms and suites spread across several vintage buildings dating from the 18th century. The rates have not yet been revealed but we expect it to be around USD 550.

The Loutrel Hotel in the US boasts a veranda-inspired lobby and a scenic view of the city from its rooftop. Charleston, known for being extremely hospitable to tourists has once again set the standard with its newly constructed 50 guestrooms.

Are these enough to get you started for the year? We hope they are. If not, keep watching this space as we will try and keep you updated with more hospitality news throughout the year.

By Shahmir Niazi



Karachi is What Karachi Eats

The seven food trends that ruled Pakistan's seaside megacity in 2021

Desk Report

Man is what he eats, goes the old saw. By that token, a metropolis is defined largely by the food trends it follows. For Karachi, those trends changed appreciably between 2021 and 2020 – at least going by this year-end list by Dawn Images, covering “Hot pot, dumplings, baos, speciality coffee and everything else that we couldn't get enough of this year”.

The piece opens with a bold statement: “If 2020 was about baking banana bread and whipping up dalgona coffee, 2021 has definitely been about getting over gimmickry. Substance over putting on a show.

“No burgers being dunked in a cheese fondue, anything Cheetos and Lotus was swiftly shifted to the side as if it never had a hold on our collective consciousness for all of last year.”

It then lists seven food trends for the year, which were are passing on to you below, verbatim, without further ado.

Trend 1: Enter even more coffee



This week alone, we have had three places launch new coffee menus in Karachi — The Verge, Drop Coffee Bar, and Eatalia.

“Coffee consumption is evolving because people are moving away from ready-made, instant mixes and becoming more aware of how to brew it at home,” says Mahwish Aziz, owner of Sugaries bakery who also recently launched a coffee menu.

“Every time someone wants to do something in the beverage industry, they are told ‘forget it, people here only drink tea’,” says Faisal Shams, owner of a specialty coffee roastery in Pakistan called Nomad Coffee Studio. “But the innovation boom coffee [this year] saw has been massive.”

As a trend, this is likely to continue into 2022. Shams also foresees baristas becoming as celebrated as chefs are right now. “That’s what happens around the world already but here, baristas are waiters who are given the additional task of making coffee without proper training. That is going to change.” Another popular coffee entrant was the Vietnamese Iced Coffee at a bao place called Basic. “Coffee appears to offer a stronger ‘kick’ and a bigger ‘rush’,” says Aziz, explaining why more people are turning towards the beverage this year.

Trend 2: The joys of baos and dumplings



If people were moving away from food that looked over-the-top and excessive, what were they moving towards? From the looks of it — baos and dumplings. Both of them “bite-sized” (compared to our usual grub anyway), something one could have on-the-go and often sporting sharp flavours — baos with their sauces, and dumplings with their accompanying chilli oil.

A food truck selling baos called Bao Bae originally started off with one truck and then expanded to having two at different locations while also operating a takeaway from their head office. Another bao place called Basic, which was riding off its popularity from Karachi Eat 2019, set up shop in 2021.

We also saw a dumpling shop open called Mariyah's Den, after seeing a multitude of home-based businesses have that as their main offering, including Noori Chan's and 23rd Baker Street.

“I think in my case, people have gone crazy over the dipping sauces and order extra to have with noodles and even daal chaawal,” says Maha Yousufi, owner of 23rd Baker Street.

Trend 3: Black Forest made a comeback because nostalgia is in



Black Forest — a cake that defined our childhood and birthdays for so many years that it eventually had people saying, “oh no, anything but that cake”. Nobody then could have foreseen it as a massive food trend in 2021. Suddenly you had restaurants claiming

to have “reinvented Black Forest”. Not only were there the usual chocolate and cherry compote cakes with whipped cream, there were also puddings, cheesecakes, tarts and even gelato! I’m pretty sure I also saw a black forest pavlova this year. This as a trend had a good run while cherries were in season but it remains to be seen whether it will gather the same momentum next year.

“The Black Forest cake is an all time classic and a favourite but what could have made it extra special in 2021 may have been the presentation,” believes Angelika Schwarzbäcker, who runs a home-based business called The Bran Culture. “The Black Forest cake that I offer as a dessert bowl was loved too.”

Trend 4: DIY but different



While DIY kits saw a brief yet forceful upsurge in 2020, this year saw the concept explored a bit deeper. Frozen beef patties, spreads, sauces, pickles, breads — anything that can help people assemble a meal at home but with them having the option to choose their own components.

Some of the more popular businesses that emerged were Farm Jars Co. who make hummus, labneh and babaganoush, So Good Sauces who ventured into bottled sauces like honey mustard, thousand island, keto mayo etc and That Guy Arif, another popular home business from 2020 that expanded their menu into chicken sausages along with their original offerings of burger patties and pickles.

Trend 5: Muhabbat Ka Sharbat



An aeronautical engineer selling a watermelon and milk-based drink called ‘Muhabbat Ka Sharbat’ (the drink of love), a mother and son duo running a macaroni stall on Burnes Road, an elderly woman selling channa chaat in Kharaadar — this year was as much about exploring good food as it was about supporting the community behind it.

Anytime someone saw a food stall or truck that could use more business a post would go up online and would garner shares and comments from people committing to support the trucks and stalls in question. The Muhabbat Ka Sharbat stall ended up being backed by a brand and was able to operate out of a proper outlet after it went viral.

Trend 6: Hot pot becomes a crowd-puller



Even when the lockdown restrictions were lifted for indoor and outdoor dining, people were a bit reluctant to venture out unless it was Xander’s — a popular restaurant that currently has three branches in Karachi. What did bring scores of people to the yard was hot pot. A dining experience that usually features a simmering pot of soup or broth and is served with condiments of your choice that can be “cooked” in it. You are likely to see dumplings, egg noodles, mushrooms, prawns, bok choy, tofu and various dipping sauces that can all be cooked in the hot pot.

While you still have people who are sceptical about “paying for food that they have to cook themselves” you always find hot pot places like Wang Wang completely packed. This year also saw older restaurants like Tao and Cocochan add hot pot to their menu along with newer restaurants like Big Tree House.

Trend 7: Top it off with bone marrow



This was the year the nalli descended on burgers after making a brief appearance on biryani plates last year. We saw places like 8oz and Burger Lab experiment with their own variations of bone marrow burgers, and The Verge already had their own take of it on their menu when they opened two years ago. Is bone marrow the addition that the beef burger scene needed to be exciting again?

Can it Steal Beijing 2022's Thunder?

What do the proponents of the diplomatic boycott hope to achieve by it?



Desk Report

The line has been drawn. Almost a dozen countries are joining hands in a diplomatic boycott of Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics, a move the rest of the world including influential nations and members of the European Union have declined to support.

Ostensibly, the initiative comes in response to a call from #NoBeijing2022 campaign, a worldwide coalition of dissidents and activists from Sinkiang, Tibet, Hong Kong, and Southern Mongolia; and aims to highlight grave human rights violations in these regions under China's repressive control.

The United States announced on 6 December 2022 it will stage a diplomatic boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics to protest China's human rights abuses. US athletes will participate in games, but the country's diplomats and officials will abstain from the event.

Other countries have since jumped aboard the bandwagon, bringing the total number to 11. These are New Zealand, Australia, Great Britain, Canada, Lithuania, Estonia, Kosovo, Japan, Austria, Belgium, besides of course United States.

Human rights defenders and leaders around the world are particularly upset over the alleged internment and torture of Uyghur, Uzbek, and Kazakh Muslims in Xinjiang, and China's suppression of democracy protests in Hong Kong.

The boycott is largely symbolic and far less extreme than the boycott of the 1980 Moscow Summer Olympics by the United States, the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries), and China to protest the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan – or the counter-boycott of the 1984 Summer Olympics in Los Angeles by Soviet Union and its allies.

China on its part has dubbed the boycott a violation of the Olympic spirit, accusing the US of attempting to interfere with the Beijing Winter Olympics out of ideological prejudice and based on lies and rumours.

Questions about the boycott, its true purpose, and its expected impact are galore. The Truth International (TTI) will tackle the following three important questions about the development.

Is it really about human rights?

Although China dismisses accusations of human rights violations as propaganda and has maintained the camps holding the Uyghurs are for vocational education and training, there is no dearth of evidence of grave human rights violations in Sinkiang, Hong Kong, Tibet, etc.

PBS Frontline recently did a special report that included footage filmed undercover inside Xinjiang. The report describes China's handling of the Uyghur as "the largest mass incarceration of an ethnic group since the Holocaust."

Likewise in Hong Kong, the Chinese have used an iron hand to crush pro-democracy voices, and its heavy-handed approach against Tibetans' is long known.

On the other hand, it is well known that many other countries with just as bad or worse human rights records continue to be US and Western allies without a problem.

The answer to our question, then, is, yes, there is a human rights dimension to it but the United States and its allies are boycotting the games because of the strategic rivalry between China, the rising power, and the United States, the declining power.

How broad is the consensus?

The boycott is insignificant in terms of mere numbers: Eleven out of 195 countries of the

world. On the other hand, the group packs some serious punch when you see what countries those are: The United States, Canada, Great Britain, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Estonia, Lithuania, Kosovo, Austria, and Belgium.

Interestingly, however, all the powerful players here are English speaking countries, with the possible exception of Japan. None of the remaining five countries (Estonia, Lithuania, Kosovo, Austria, and Belgium) any considerable power of influence.

It is thus evident that the consensus over the boycott is quite narrow. Equally, it is a reflection on China's burgeoning economic clout. That almost all major European and Middle Eastern allies of the US stayed away from the boycott leaves no doubt that the days of American hegemony over the world are numbered.

Will it have any impact?

What kind of an impact the boycott is going to have is another question foreign policy mandarins in key capitals around the world must grapple with. There are two key areas

to watch for impact: How China chooses to respond to this perceived provocation, and how it plays out on the Western public opinion.

On the first count, there are already signs China has no plans to take it lying down. In fact, several foreign policy experts have already warned the US and allies to brace for a stiff Chinese response at the appropriate time and place.

In terms of public opinion, the boycott may well come to be seen as a seminal moment a decade or two down the line when its impact on civil society has crystallised.

A factor to watch will be how the athletes from the boycotting nations conduct themselves at the Games. If some of them chose to record their protest, say, at the podium after winning, the importance of the boycott as an international event will be accentuated, and the self-righteousness born of these actions mainstreamed at least in the English speaking world.

If that happens, our world will have moved a step closer to the coming cold war – and that is an optimistic take.



Legendary Leg-Spinner Yasir Shah Deserves a Second Chance

By Khurram Kaleem

It was November 2018 when Pakistan was hosting New Zealand in the United Arab Emirates. The test series turned out to be one of the most important series in the career of legendary leg spinner Yasir Shah. At that point, he was trying to reach the milestone of “fastest bowler to grab two hundred wickets in test cricket”. The record holder at the time was CV Grimmett of Australia who managed to achieve the milestone in just thirty-six matches in 1936.

During the last eighty-two years, no bowler had been able to break this record. R Ashwin narrowly missed the chance when he completed the double century of test wickets in thirty-seven matches. He managed to complete this target in nearly five years, which is the shortest period.

When Yasir Shah reached the UAE to play against New Zealand, he already had 173 wickets under his belt in just 30 test matches. It was then expected that he might need another test series to reach the milestone (of two-hundred wickets) as it appeared a daunting target for a series of three test matches. To utter surprise, Yasir started the series with an eight-wicket haul in the Abu Dhabi test which must have served as a source of hope and motivation for the upcoming matches. The Dubai Test turned out to be the best test match of Yasir's career. He grabbed a career-best eight wickets for forty-one runs in the first innings of the match and managed to get six for 143 runs in the second innings to achieve his career-best figures: fourteen wickets for 184 runs.

In the last match of the series in Abu Dhabi, he needed five more wickets to reach the target of two-hundred test wickets. And guess what. He achieved it in the second innings of the match to become the first bowler to take that many wickets in just thirty-three test matches. Concurrently, he also managed to break the record of R. Ashwin by reaching this milestone in just over four years.

Who knew that the New Zealand series would accord Yasir Shah an opportunity to attain his career-best bowling figures for an innings, a test match, and a three-test matches series? However, soon after, things took a turn for the worse. This legendary performance can easily be described as the starting point of the end of Yasir's predominance in test cricket.

The test cricketer has only grabbed thirty-three wickets in the last thirteen test matches.

Yasir Shah, who earlier grabbed five wickets in an innings sixteen times and ten wickets in a test match, has ever since been unable to achieve a five-wicket-haul for the last three years. The last time when he grabbed five wickets in an innings was the second innings of the Dubai Test against New Zealand in November 2018.

Yasir Shah's seven-year career can be dissected into two parts. Where in the first half, he grabbed two-hundred test wickets in just thirty-three matches, and in the second he took 33 wickets in the thirteen matches he played.



Ever since the series against New Zealand in 2018, Pakistan has played twenty-one test matches out of which Yasir Shah has not been able to play eight matches due to poor form or fitness problems. He even missed out on Pakistan's last series against Bangladesh due to a thumb injury.

Off-the-field activities also keep Yasir Shah in the news. Recently in an FIR filed on the complaint of a lady, Yasir Shah was nominated as an accomplice. This whole situation is quite alarming for the Pakistan cricket team which was primarily relying on the spin attack led by Yasir Shah. Now, Pakistan has to rely on the relatively in-experienced Nauman Ali and Sajid Khan; the former has grabbed nineteen wickets in his seven test match appearances while the latter has sent eighteen players to the pavilion in the four Test matches he played for Pakistan. This performance can be considered somewhat satisfactory but still, there are consistency issues.

Owing to the strong pace attack lineup comprising of Hassan Ali and Shaheen Shah Afridi, who have performed exceptionally well in recent matches, the team was able to mitigate the damage caused by Yasir's absence.

If Yasir Shah focuses again on his cricket and fitness, Pakistan's bowling attack would become far more lethal. Soon, Pakistan will host Australia on its pitches which are naturally conducive for spin bowling. One good series could allow Yasir Shah the opportunity to rediscover his talent, for which he has been waiting for the last three years.

The PCB must provide Yasir with technical and moral assistance in this critical situation. A short coaching session with Shane Warne can help him overcome his shortcomings. There is still so much cricket left in Yasir Shah and careful handling of his case by the PCB can help him realize his potential, once again.

Brilliant Babar Leads Pakistan to An Incredible Year of Cricket



By Ali Abdullah

Babar Azam ended the year 2021 as the No.1 batsman in ODI as well as T20I format. The final International Cricket Council (ICC) ranking came out on December 29 which showed that the cricketer has topped the list in both the formats, with Dawid Malan sharing the first position in T20I with equal rating points.

Although Pakistan played only six ODI games last year; three each against South Africa and England – Babar Azam managed to score a hefty 405 runs in ODI cricket, becoming the top run-getter for Pakistan during the year. Both were away tours. The average score of 67.50 in ODI cricket reflects on the tremendous year Babar had while playing for the national team.

The list of achievements for the brilliantly talented sportsman continues. In 2021, Babar became the second Pakistani captain to win an ODI series in South Africa. He also delivered his career-best ODI performance, smashing 158 against England in the final ODI.

Ever since dethroning Virat Kohli to become the No.1 ODI batsman on April 7, 2021, Babar has remained on top for almost eight months now. It would be interesting to see if Babar can continue to dominate the ODI rankings as Pakistan prepares to compete against a formidable Australia in the upcoming ODI series to be played at home. Presently, Babar (865 rating points) is facing a close chase from Kohli (857 rating points).

As far as the T20I rankings are concerned, Babar Azam has claimed the top position on several occasions. He became the leading

run-scorer of the ICC Men's T20 World Cup 2021 and also smashed his first-ever T20I century, against South Africa, becoming the first Pakistani Captain to score a T20I century. However, after the World T20, Babar struggled with the bat during the subsequent series against Bangladesh and West Indies.

It's important to note that Babar Azam was not the top-ranked T20I batsman at the start of the year 2021. It was not until October that he regained the top spot, only to lose it again in December to Dawid Malan due to poor performances in the series against Bangladesh and West Indies. However, during the final T20I of the year, Babar got the crucial runs to reacquire the top spot – but this time he had to share it with Malan who has the same rating points.

After years of wait, Pakistan has finally got a batsman who is dominating the batting rankings. Babar will head into 2022 with much more expectations from the fans, particularly attached to his performance in Test Cricket. He is currently ranked No.9 in Test Batsmen rankings as he failed to pull anything significant in the format.

All in all, 2021 was an incredible year for Pakistan Cricket. Pakistani cricketers were nominated in prestigious categories by the ICC. Babar Azam was nominated as men's ODI cricketer of the year, Muhammad Rizwan as T20I cricketer of the year, and Pakistani fastball sensation Shaheen Shah Afridi clinched the third spot in the longest format of the game.

Television Debutants of 2021

A rollcall of the most promising new entrants to the world of television drama over the year gone by

By **Kaukab Jahan**

Like the previous year 2020, 2021 also proved to be a good year for Pakistani drama industry. As wave after wave of Covid-19 pandemic continued to come and go throughout the year, people mostly stayed at homes and spent their time watching television.

As they watched the varied dramas on the offer, television viewers inevitably relished some fresh talent acting in them. That talent included some already well-known names being introduced to acting for the first time and some new faces who started their showbiz career as acting and became talk of the town.

Here we discuss some debutants in television dramas of Pakistan, whether they appeared in lead roles, second leads, supporting or character roles. Many well established names from the fields of fashion and music entered into the world of acting and strongly marked their presence in this arena as well.

Hassan Sheheryar Yasin (Pehli Si Mohabbat)



We start with already a household name from Pakistan's fashion industry, Hassan Sheheryar Yasin. A well-established fashion designer known by his initials, HSY has proved himself as a television host through his successful prime time talk show 'Tonight With HSY' on Hum Sitaray.

Last year, he also came as an actor in ARY Digital drama serial 'Pehli Si Muhabbat'. He donned the role of Akram, a conservative religious man from a middle class family. In the beginning, it seemed that he had some difficulty in getting fully into the shoes of his role, but in later episodes he merged himself completely in it, which was both enjoyed and admired by the audience.

Hadiqa Kiani (Raqeeb Se)



Hadiqa Kiani needs no introduction. She has gained international fame and fortune through her singing and her unique compositions. Whether it is playback singing or rock/pop and folk fusion, she is always ahead of any female singer in the country.

Last year, the songstress proved that she had the same talent in the field of acting as she had shown in her music career spanning almost three decades. In Raqeeb Se, her first drama serial aired on Hum TV between January and May 2021, she portrayed Sakina, a rural woman who met her love after a long gap of 20 years, but not with the intention to get him but asking for a safe place for her daughter, who had suffered badly by her sadist father.

Kiani proved herself as an actor in front of veterans like Noman Ijaz and Sania Saeed. Her second serial Dobara is currently airing, also on Hum TV, where she is playing the role of Mehrunnisa, a wealthy widow, who finds her true love in a young boy the age of her son.

We wish her luck and hope she opts for more interesting and diverse roles in future as well.

Azaan Sami Khan (Ishq E Laa)

Another singer who made his spurs as an actor last year was Azaan Sami Khan. Son of the talented actress of subcontinent, Zeba Bakhtiar and world-famous musician Adnan Sami Khan, Azaan seems passionate for acting as well as his music. We would expect no less from someone with his gene pool!

Azaan is appearing in Hum TV's drama serial Ishq-e-Laa as Azlaan opposite Sajal Aly. Portraying a role of a young and ambitious business man, Azaan has proved his acting skills through his calculated dialogue delivery and appropriate expressions.

Danyal Zafar (Tanaa Banaa)

It would seem 2021 was the year of singers making their acting debut. Here we are talking about Danyal Zafar, the younger brother of internationally renowned Pakistani musician and actor Ali Zafar.

Danyal started his music career five years back with Coke Studio. He also opted for his professional name as Danny Zee later. Tanaa Banaa, a Ramzan special rom-com series on Hum TV, gave him his debut role opposite Alizeh Shah.

Danyal played Zain, a young boy who is trying very hard to get the girl he loves. Danyal was definitely noticed for his acting prowess in this light comedy role.

Aymen Saleem (Chupke Chupke)



When it comes to comedy roles, another name which shone like a star in entertainment industry of Pakistan was Aymen Saleem. She appeared in Chupke Chupke, another Ramzan special comedy drama serial on HUM TV, in the role of Ramisha Ibrahim aka Mishi.

After the first few episodes, she started to be noticed by fans and critiques and became a sensation by the end of the serial. Daughter of former cricketer Saleem Yousuf, Aymen had not tried her luck before in any field of showbiz professionally.

Yes, she is a close relative of world renowned late singer Nazia Hasan, who was her maternal aunt (his uncle's wife). What this young lady has in future for her fans we must wait and watch.

Arslan Naseer (Chupke Chupke)

Another talent which Pakistani drama industry discovered in 2021 was Arslan Naseer, who appeared in Chupke Chupke opposite Aymen Saleem as Muhammad Hadi Kamil.

The interesting thing to note was that both these debutants who won instant fame were the second leads in the play. Already a digital media star through his YouTube channel CBA which has approximately 1.18 million subscribers, Naseer pursued acting for the first time in Chupke Chupke and hit the jackpot.

Zaviyar Noman (Qissa Meherbano Ka)



If someone wants to know or remember what the veteran Nauman Ijaz looked like when he entered the field of acting, they only need to see his son Zaviyar Nauman Ijaz, who debuted last year in Hum TV's drama serial Qissa Meherbano Ka as Mehran opposite Mawra Hocane.

With all the good looks and abilities of a promising actor, Zaviyar has a long way to go to make his own niche in the profession.

Dananeer Mobeen (Sinf e Aahan)



Talking about sensation, one cannot ignore the young girl from Islamabad, Dananeer Mobeen, whose 'Pawri Ho Rahi Hai' meme took her fame across the border. Her five second instagram video got viral everywhere and was memed by social media users including famous celebrities in Pakistan and even India.

Mobeen has also started her acting career from an ISPR project on ARY Digital, Sinf-e Aahan as Syeda Sidra, a girl from a conservative religious family, whose induction in army is her first trip from the house alone.

Daughter of a serving army officer in reality, Dananeer says she would have to choose her projects with special permission from the office.

From Hasan Raheem to Natasha Noorani: The 13 most played Pakistani songs on CityFM89 in 2021

Did your favourite song make it onto our list?



Desk Report

2021 was a great year for those who listen Pakistani music. It was the year Hasan Raheem took centre-stage in his pink hoodie, when Maanu 'came thru' with some absolute bangers and Abdullah Siddiqui was the knight in shining armour for Pakistan's EDM genre.

At CityFM89, there were many, many songs that made it to the top 100 list but these are the 13 Pakistani songs that were played on repeat throughout most of the year. The list is based on songs most played by our RJs, songs that were all the rage at the time of their release as well as those frequently requested by listeners. Did your favourite song make it onto the list?

'Faasla' by Shamoon Ismail featuring Hasan Raheem



Islamabad-based singer Shamoon Ismail has made a name for himself with his bluesy Punjabi songs and this particular song featuring the popular Hasan Raheem was a favourite for weeks after its release in September.

'Be Myself' by Aima Baig and Abdullah Siddiqui

Here's a fun collaboration that actually came out in December 2020 but has been riding the airwaves throughout much of 2021.



'Boom Boom' by Meesha Shafi

Singer Meesha Shafi really killed it with this cover of Nazia Hassan's 1982 song of the same name. We were afraid that she might not do justice to this classic but Shafi did not disappoint.

'Cricket Khidaiye' by Atif Aslam, Faris Shafi and Talal Qureshi

If there was ONE song everyone listened to on repeat to keep the adrenaline pumping throughout the ICC Men's T20 World Cup in October, it was this banger by Atif Aslam and Faris Shafi.

'Hot Mango Chutney Sauce' by Meesha Shafi



This little number by Meesha Shafi was a critics favourite for its fun lyrics and and catchy EDM beats. You know a song is going to turn out well if it has Siddiqui on board as producer.

'You and I' by Saba Jaswal featuring Abdullah Siddiqui

Speaking of Siddiqui, here's another favourite hat played on FM89 for weeks on end.

'Baby Baby' by Nastasha Noorani



Is a list about Pakistani songs even complete if Natasha Noorani doesn't make the cut? This number is one of our favourite songs to have come out of Velo Sound Station.

'Haye Dil Bechara' by Jimmy Khan from film Parey Hut Love

One listener on YouTube called this the most underrated song to have come out of the film industry. Do you agree?

'Come Thru' by Abdullah Siddiqui featuring Maanu

Here's another Siddiqui song featuring the smooth vocals of the 'Meloncholic' singer Maanu himself.

'Choro' by Natasha Noorani

Here is a song that most of us chilled out to in the summers after its release. Noorani's 'Choro' offered its listeners the perfect heartbreak song of the year.

'Do Pal' by Taha G. featuring Maanu

This beautiful number by Taha G. and Maanu is a bittersweet song that'll have you lost in thought for hours on end.



'Filhaal' by Towers

This killer song was another summer favourite amongst listeners, the perfect number to crank up on a road trip adventure with friends.

'Joona' by Hasan Raheem featuring Abdullah Kasumbi

Hasan Raheem's 'Joona' stands at numero uno, which isn't surprising at all given how obsessed everyone became with the singer and his catchy beats. There has been no dearth of good music from Raheem this year and we hope to hear more from him in 2022.

There are many, many more Pakistan songs that made to our 'favourite songs' playlist in 2021. Which songs did you play on repeat this year?

Remembering Desmond Tutu: 'A Thorn in The Side of the Apartheid Government'

By Mishaal Ashraf

Bishop Tutu, a Nobel Peace Prize winner who strove to end racism in South Africa breathed his last on January 2, at the age of 90. His death was confirmed by the president of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa, as he paid homage to the anti-apartheid icon, "a leader of principle and pragmatism who gave meaning to the biblical insight that faith without works is dead."

Dismund Tutu was born in 1931 in Klerksdorp, Transvaal. According to the Desmond and Leah Tutu Legacy Foundation, he passed away from prostate cancer in a care facility in Melbourne. He was initially diagnosed with the disease in 1997 and was hospitalized several times thereafter.

Bishop Tutu was a leader revered for his nonviolent stance during the anti-apartheid movement that later earned him a Nobel Peace Prize in 1984. He spearheaded the Black South Africans freedom struggle for decades. The movement gained momentum in the early 1990s when he established a new relationship between white and black citizens.

As chairman of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, he recorded testimony documenting the viciousness of apartheid. Tutu believed in restorative justice rather than retributive justice. He argued that to treat a wound it was important to cleanse it first. Therefore, for an honest accounting of past crimes, his committee offered amnesty.

In 2010, Archbishop Tutu told the New York Times Magazine, "I think we are at a bad place in South Africa...and especially when you contrast it with the Mandela era. Many of the things that we dreamed were possible seem to be getting more and more out of reach. We have the most unequal society in the world."

In 2011, the Nobel Prize winner assailed the government when the African National Congress (ANC) was accused of corruption and mismanagement by the critics. "This government, our government, is worse than the apartheid government because at least you are expecting it with the apartheid government," he said. "Mr. Zuma, you and your government do not represent me. You represent your own interests. I am warning you out of love, one day we will start praying for your defeat of the ANC government. You are disgraceful," Tutu added.

His words seemed prophetic when, in 2016, an alliance of religious leaders in South Africa joined other critics in urging Mr. Zuma to quit. In early 2018, Mr. Zuma was ousted after a power struggle with his deputy, Mr. Ramaphosa, who took over the presidency in February of that year.

By then, Archbishop Tutu had largely stopped giving interviews because of failing health and rarely appeared in public. But a few months after Mr. Ramaphosa was sworn in as the new president with the promise of a "new dawn" for the nation, the archbishop welcomed him at his home.

Bishop Tutu studied at Johannesburg Bantu High School, following in the footsteps of his father. He trained as a teacher at Pretoria



Bantu National College in 1954 and graduated from the University of South Africa. Three years into high school teaching, he began studying theology and was ordained a priest in 1960. Tutu pursued his master's degree in theology from England, where he later taught for three years as the assistant director of a theological institute in London.

Bishop Tutu was appointed as the first black Dean of St. Mary's Cathedral in Johannesburg. He served as the Bishop of Lesotho during 1976-1978 and in 1978 he became the first black General Secretary of the South African Council of Churches. Because of his outstanding contribution to academia, Tutu was offered honorary doctorates by several leading universities in Germany, the UK, and the US.

Bishop Tutu was a global leader and spellbinding preacher for the oppressed. He would teach parishioners to choose the path of non-violence in their movement and reassure them of God's love. Politics played an important part in his religious teachings, "We had the land, and they had the Bible," he said in one of his parables. "Then they said, 'Let us pray', and we closed our eyes. When we opener them again, they had the land and we had the Bible. Maybe we got the better end of the deal".

Bishop Tutu officially relinquished public service in 2010. One of the major appearances towards the end of his career was at the World Cup opening ceremony in South Africa. Even after his retirement, Tutu made appearances at a multitude of events. In 2011, he joined Michelle Obama at the new Cape Town Stadium to promote physical fitness.

Demonstrating genuine care for his people, as the Covid pandemic raged on, he played a significant role in dispelling misapprehensions about the vaccine and appealed to his followers: "There is nothing to fear. Don't let COVID-19 continue to ravage our country, or our world. Vaccinate".

The Lost World

A young, smart journalist, Ed Malone was frantically in love. The lady he adored and loved led him to believe that he would possibly get an opportunity with her if only he did something brave and heroic. The most brave activity his supervisor could imagine was to send him to talk with Professor Challenger and interview him for throwing the reporters out of his house. Challenger leads him to a hidden plateau in the South American jungle - a place which was home to many dinosaurs, giant fish lizards and murderous ape-men.

I found this book quite easy to read one of the reasons being that it was narrated in first person. I hoped for action and mystery but was caught by the author's sense of humour. The writing was pretty engaging at some points, wonderfully funny too. The plot is joyful which makes it more fun to read.

The interesting thing I found was that there were hardly any women in the story but the women who were in the novel were not treated decently and did not have a developing character.

Other than that, the book was really great to read; full of adventures and it continued looking for new excites and sensations. It felt like an old school fantasy and was one of the most pleasant readings about different and extinct animals.

As the story was written years ago, the reader should be prepared to meet some of the rational language and different mentalities of all time.

The character development in the story was quite fascinating. One of the main characters, Challenger, was shown arrogant and aggressive, who frequently used to throw the reporters and journalists out of his house. One of my favourite characters was Roxton, who had a very charming personality and was pretty cool headed.

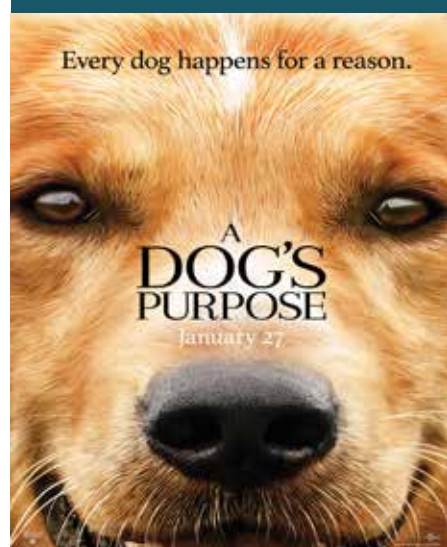
Overall, I really liked reading this book mainly because it had too much information about animals that do not exist. There are many adventurous quests throughout the novel and has a lively end. I would recommend this book for children above the age of 10 so that they can read the book by fully understanding it.

Author: Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: -13 – 978-1847496508
Pages: 280
Publisher: Puffin Classics



A dog's purpose

Author: Bruce Cameron
Reviewed by: Alizay Ashraf
ISBN: 978-1-76055-145-2
Pages: 336
Publisher: Tom Doherty Associates



A dog's purpose is an exceptional story of one charming dog's quest for his motivation throughout the span of a few lives. The story is about a dog's actual point and what his purpose is. Amazed to find himself to be born as a messy brilliant brown haired little dog after an unfortunately short life as a wanderer dog, Bailey's quest for his new life's importance drives him into the caring arms of 8-year-old Ethan. During their innumerable experiences, Bailey gladly finds how to be a decent dog. Bailey's first memory comes shortly after he's born when he figures out that the other warm, smelly things that were around him were his siblings.

I really enjoyed the unique view of the world by a dog's perspective. It was really interesting and fascinated me. I found the book heartwarming and innocent. The plot was bitter-sweet, and sentimental. In my opinion, this book can be read by any age group and it will still bring joy to your heart.

The book talks about the ups and down in a dog's life and what it goes through. The book has so much emotion and is very well written. It shows that the author might be a dog owner because he took his time creating a dog character with enough love.

The main themes of this book are love, hope and trust. It shows how everyone deserves love and is worthy to be treated normally. Secondly, it shows that that nothing is impossible; it shows that there's a way for everything and you can guide yourself to the right path, you just need to be hopeful. Thirdly, it shows a person needs to be honest and should not disappoint a person who has trusted you.

I really enjoyed reading this book and would definitely recommend it to my friends. Readers who have pet dogs will enjoy and relate to this book a lot. This book is suitable for all age groups.



Mari Petroleum Company Limited

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.



☎ 051 111-410-410

✉ info@mpcl.com.pk

🌐 mpcl.com.pk