

# The Truth International

1<sup>st</sup> - 15<sup>th</sup> January 2022

Political Scene  
Strong nerves will win

IMF Package  
Hard to swallow, difficult to spit

Afghanistan Humanitarian Crisis  
Cruel silence of international community

## Arranging The Political Puzzle



Rs. 435

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

🌐 [www.thetruthinternational.com](http://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

Party Time? By Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 04**

## Politics

Is the Party Over? By Khalid Wasim – **Page 05**

Sharif vs Khan: The Epic Clash On Our Hands by Noor Aftab – **Page 07**

Khan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Debacle by Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel – **Page 09**

Who Wants Sindh Local Government Polls Postponed? by Azfar Ashfaq – **Page 11**

## 2021: Year in Review

Debates, Controversies, and Clashes by Sarfraz Raja – **Page 14**

Battered and Bruised but Plodding On - Desk Report – **Page 16**

Year 2021 in Review: The Pakistani Cyberspace by Amna Shoaib – **Page 18**

## Economy

Pakistan's Endless Scramble to Keep the IMF Bailout on Track by Mehtab Haider – **Page 20**

The Bitter Fruits of Economic Adhocism by Javed Mahmood – **Page 22**

The Anatomy of the Gas Crisis by Khaliq Ahmad – **Page 24**

## Foreign Affairs

Can Anything Come up to Mitigate "the Worst Humanitarian Crisis on Earth"? By Haq Nawaz Nawaz Khan – **Page 26**

Why OIC is Under Fire in Pakistan by Mishaal Ashraf – **Page 30**

The Vicious Cycle of Sanctions by Hamzah Rifaat Hussain – **Page 32**

The Travails of Liberal Democracies by Umer Farooq – **Page 33**

Iran Could be Close to Crossing the Nuclear Rubicon by Shameer Niazi – **Page 35**

Is Western-Style Democracy on the Decline? By Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 37**

## Pakistan Festivals

Merry Chitramas from Bumburet! By Zahiruddin – **Page 28**

## Investigation

How Good is Our Auto Industry Development and Export Policy? By Azeem Waqas – **Page 38**

## History

End Times: A Muslim Perspective by Azmat M Saqib – **Page 40**

## Social Issues

Punjab's VAW Epidemic - TTI Report – **Page 42**

## Climate Change

Climate Emergency at the Rooftop of Pakistan by Momina Ashraf – **Page 43**

## Sports

Cricket Under the Grim Shadow of Covid-19 by Khurram Kaleem – **Page 45**

There is No Template for Greatness by Ali Abdullah – **Page 47**

## Entertainment

Up Close and Personal with Syra Yousuf by Kaukab Jahan – **Page 49**

BBC's Film Parade from 2021 by Ayesha Javaid – **Page 51**

**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

# Party Time?

By Hammad Ghaznavi



In the wake of the Local Bodies polls debacle in Khyber Pakhtunkwah, Pakistan Tehrik-e-Insaf Chairman Imran Khan has dissolved the party structure across the country and nominated the new party office-bearers. Merit was flouted by the party organization in the distribution of party tickets in KP, was the reason cited for the party reshuffle. The party spokesperson also underlined the upcoming LB polls in other provinces as a reason for reorganizing the party.

The key question: is the diagnosis right? Did the PTI lose because the party tickets were distributed among the kith and kin of the powerful local PTI politicians, flouting merit? Or is the bad governance responsible for the PTI embarrassment in KP LB polls?

PTI has been issuing tickets to the kin of its weighty leaders, like all other political parties, and winning in the past. If you look at the list of losing PTI candidates in the recent LB polls in KP, it includes all kinds of contestants, related to the party bigwigs or not. In most of the cases, actually, PTI issued tickets to its best candidate. Examples are numerous. Just look at the Peshawar Mayor election. Interestingly, all the major political parties here issued tickets to the next generation of the party stalwarts, but PTI. The mayor-elect, JUI's Haji Zubair Ali, is the son-in-law of Maulana Fazalur Rehman. Hence, the analysis by the PTI of its defeat in KB polls sounds a little erroneous.

All the new appointments in the PTI are the ministers in the federal government, from Asad Umar, the new secretary General of the party, to Pervez Khattak (President KPK), Shafqat Mehmood (President Punjab), Khusro Bakhtiar (President South Punjab), Ali Zaidi (President Sindh). Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri has been nominated the president of Baluchistan. Can this bunch organize the party at the grassroots level? Have they done justice to their respective ministries that now they are entrusted with this additional responsibility? It's difficult to answer these questions in the affirmative.

True, the other political parties in the country also nominate, not elect, party officials and there is no firm tradition of genuine intra-party elections. PTI tried to hold a 'free and fair' party election in 2013, but miserably failed, and dissolved the structure in 2015. There were serious allegations of irregularities against the exercise. So, the party constituted an enquiry commission headed by Justice (R) Wajeehuddin that confirmed massive rigging in the party polls. In brief, after that experience Imran Khan never took the risk of party elections. The organizational structures of all the major political parties in the country leave much to be desired but PTI perhaps takes the cake in this regard. It is also a fact that when in power, in general, the party organization is ignored, and PTI is no exception.

An electoral defeat is always a good time for soul searching. An honest analysis

can help reach correct diagnosis which, in turn, can lead to right treatment. After the LB polls defeat, many PTI leaders thought, the party voter was disgruntled with the PTI for a set of reasons but the primary factor remained the monster of inflation. The unprecedented price-hike is a killer for the common man. From the electricity, gas and petrol prices to essential food items' rates, there is no respite for the middle and lower-middle classes. And the worst is yet to come, economic indicators suggest.

Independent sources insist that Pakistan's economy is destined to slide down in the next couple of years. Former FBR chief Shabbar Zaidi argued that the country has already gone 'bankrupt'. Punjab Governor Muhammad Sarwar thinks that Pakistan has surrendered its economic sovereignty to the IMF. With around Rs 600 billion adjustments, the mini-budget can only make life more difficult for the common man. It is against this background that the PTI has lost various by-elections and the recent KP local bodies' polls. If, at all, the government takes the risk of holding the LB polls in other provinces, PTI insiders admit, the results can be more embarrassing for the party.

Cosmetic revamping of the party structure is not the solution. Controlling the inflation is. With the government in its fourth year, there is not much time left. Give immediate relief to the common man!



# Is the Party Over?

*Since its electoral debacle in KP, Pakistan's ruling party seems to be unravelling*



By Khalid Wasim

Reeling from the shock of the recent electoral defeat in Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa and confounded by an abrupt shifting of gears by Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N), Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) seems to be coming apart at the seams.

Or is the suddenly beleaguered cricket-turned-politician taking it apart himself under some dark destructive impulse?

The humiliation which the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) faced due to its defeat at its home-ground in the first phase of the local government elections held in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 19 December jolted the entire party structure, forcing Prime Minister Imran Khan to take another U-turn and revive the eight-year old model.

Days after the shocking defeat, Khan in his capacity as the PTI chairman dissolved the party's organisational structure across the country and nominated new office-bearers at the central and provincial levels. Federal Minister for Planning and Development Asad Umar, who had previously failed to deliver as the finance minister, has now been appointed as central secretary general of the party in place of drug-scandal tainted Aamer Mehmood Kiani, who has been demoted and made additional secretary general in the new set-up.

Federal Minister for Education and Professional Training Shafqat Mahmood is now president of the party's Central Punjab chapter and Federal Minister for Industries and Production Khusro Bakhtiar has been made president of the PTI's South Punjab chapter. Minister for Maritime Affairs Ali Zaidi is now heading the PTI's Sindh chapter whereas Defence Minister Pervez Khattak has been given the responsibility to reorganise the party in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. National Assembly Deputy Speaker Qasim Suri has been nominated as president of the PTI's Balochistan chapter.

It was after the general elections in 2013 that the PTI had introduced a new party structure under which Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa had been divided into four regions each with no office-bearers at the province level. Later, the same structure based on regions was maintained in the new constitution adopted by the party in 2019 and Sindh and Balochistan were likewise divided into four regions.

Mr Khan has now once again abolished the party's organisational structure as given in the present constitution and appointed office-bearers at the central and provincial level using his "special powers".

Several years back, when the PTI had nominated the office-bearers at the regional level, its leaders had made tall

claims that their party was the first to take the organisational structure at the grassroots level.

The PTI leaders have a canny knack for inventing the most compelling justifications for their every act even if it is not in line with the party's manifesto, constitution or promise.

The defeat in KP has had such a huge impact that the party has decided to review its whole constitution and Mr Khan has already constituted a special constitutional committee for this purpose. The party had adopted the present constitution only in 2019 and now the party leaders have started saying that there are "loopholes" in it which need to be rectified.

On the other hand, there has been resentment within the party ranks, particularly in Punjab, over Imran Khan's kneejerk action of dissolving the party's local chapters. The PTI workers and some senior members are unhappy over the appointment of federal ministers as new party officials as they believe these very people are responsible for the crisis currently facing the party.

Party insiders are of the view that those responsible for the KP humiliation must be taken to task but there is no justification for punishing party functionaries in other provinces. Reacting to the appointment of Shafqat



Mahmood as the PTI Punjab president, a provincial leader reportedly recalled that the party had lost the previous LG elections in the province under his leadership.

The shocking defeat in the KP local bodies polls has come for the PTI at a time when its governments at the centre and in the provinces have already completed more than half of their five-year term and when the country is about to enter the election mode. Equally important, the local government polls in Punjab are just round the corner.



Soon after the LG polls results started to trickle in from various parts of the KP, the PTI leaders started giving various reasons for the party's poor performance and shocking defeat in the province where it had been in power for more than eight years.

Some senior party members, including Federal Minister for Science and Technology Shibli Faraz and provincial minister Shaukat Yousufzai, openly admitted that the party had suffered this humiliation due to the unprecedented inflation and overall poor economic conditions in the country.

On the other hand, others including Prime Minister Imran Khan, have put the entire blame on the party's provincial leadership which, according to them, fielded unsuitable candidates after awarding tickets based on nepotism and favouritism instead of merit.

Mr Khan reportedly grilled KP Chief Minister Mahmood Khan when the latter came to Islamabad to present a report on the KP polls. The prime minister has now declared that he would personally monitor the LG polls in future.

"The PTI made mistakes in the 1st phase of KP LG elections & paid the price. Wrong candidate selection was a major cause. From now on, I will personally be overseeing PTI's LG election strategy in 2nd phase of KP LG elections & LG elections across Pakistan. Insha Allah PTI will come out stronger", tweeted Mr Khan.

There are many in the PTI who do not agree with their party boss. PTI MNA from Peshawar Noor Alam Khan is one of them. In a TV talk show, he stated that

the 'wrong' selection of candidates could not be blamed for the party's defeat, adding that the people in villages were unwilling to receive PTI tickets due to government's poor performance.

In an apparent criticism to the top party leaders, the PTI MNA even reportedly said the governments could not be run by Twitter and social media accounts only. He even predicted that the results of the second phase of the KP polls would not be different if the real issues were not addressed within two weeks.

Information Minister Fawad Chaudhry admits that the PTI failed to clinch top offices in the LG polls, but claims that the PTI is still the single largest party in the province. He termed the victory of Jamiat Ulema-i-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) in the elections "unfortunate" and "harmful" for the country.

"It is unfortunate that, due to our mistakes, such a political party has been noticed [by the people]," the information minister reportedly said, adding that the rise of

"religious extremist parties" such as the TLP and JUI-F would ultimately harm the country.

Commenting on the situation, Dawn's Islamabad Resident Editor Fahd Husain in his column titled "KP rings the alarm bell" published 23 December said, "Just like that, KP body-slammed PTI into the hard ground of reality.

"The unthinkable had happened to the unbreakable and it was unbearable. Now the usual is combining with the predictable to paint the picture of a party putting up a brave face by ordering enquiries, summoning explanations and identifying scapegoats.

"But the smart ones in the party are also realising with a growing sense of alarm that what happens in KP may not stay in KP. With its fortress breached, the party may now find itself fighting for its political survival".

Besides this, there has been ripples within the PTI over reports in political and social circles about development of some kind of understanding between the PML-N and the military establishment. So much so that the PML-N leaders have also started making claims about the return of Nawaz Sharif to the country.

It is not clear at this point if there has been any real progress in this direction or the PML-N is simply playing a political bluff to baffle the PTI leadership.

According to Mr Husain, "There were a host of reasons why PTI got such a drubbing on its home ground, but one key factor — according to insiders — was the fact that the PTI did not get active support from places it used to get it. There was a 'hands off' policy that let the political stakeholders slug it out on their own without any backing, assistance or facilitation.

"In Punjab, the ruling party legislators are getting restless and edgy. They can sniff the wind and smell the whiff of trouble. Some have started to flirt with the PML-N. January and February will weigh heavy around the PTI's neck".





# Sharif vs Khan: The Epic Clash On Our Hands

*As Sharif plots his path back to power, Khan is prepping the fightback of a lifetime*

By Noor Aftab

Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif has for some time badgered the military and security agencies to mind their own business and leave politics to politicians. But if his wish is indeed granted, leaving Prime Minister Imran Khan firmly in the hot seat, the older Sharif may well find he has got more than he bargained for.

There are unmistakable signs the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) leader, presumably convinced the generals are prepared to return to their constitutionally mandated role, is plotting his return to power from his London retreat.

Equally, there are clear indications Khan is planning to defend his turf all by himself in a no-holds-barred clash with the would-be challenger.

Sharif and Khan are both larger-than-life personalities with considerable followings. Where Sharif has his political machine, Khan has his personal cult. But a seasoned political campaigner as Sharif is, it remains to be seen what inner resources he can marshal to match the fire and fury Khan can generate, especially when threatened.

For the moment, though, Sharif is stuck in London, where a new 'London Plan' is said to be in the works to usher in political change in Pakistan through in-house change in parliament.

It is by no means easy to find out what is actually cooking up in London. We have seen presence of so many influential political figures in the city like former Speaker National Assembly Sardar Ayaz Sadiq, disgruntled leader of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) Jahangir Khan Tareen, and Pakistan People's Party (PPP) stalwarts Makhdoom Ahmad Mehmood and Faryal Talpur.

Nawaz Sharif held a two-hour-long, closed-door meeting with Makhdoom Ahmad Mehmood. The information provided to media through informal sources stated that both leaders talked about the political situation of South Punjab.

Interestingly, Makhdoom Ahmad Mehmood has a residential apartment in London that is situated quite close to the office of Nawaz Sharif. In Lahore, he is a neighbour of Shahbaz Sharif in Model Town. There is a beautiful swimming pool at his well-appointed residence and Shahbaz Sharif has visited it on a number of occasions in the past.

As soon as Makhdoom Ahmad Mehmood reached his home after meeting Nawaz Sharif, PPP leader Faryal Talpur approached him and they held a long meeting of their own.

Before all this Nawaz Sharif contacted Speaker Punjab Assembly Chaudhry Pervaiz Ellahi and indirectly made an invitation to the Chaudhry brothers asking them to call on him whenever they travel to London.



Behind-the-scenes interaction with opposition members revealed that PPP wants no-confidence motion against Speaker National Assembly Asad Qaiser, Punjab Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, and Prime Minister Imran Khan – probably in that order.

The PML-N leadership is pondering over two major issues including neutrality of 'powerful quarters' and credibility of PPP. The PML-N wants to know whether the establishment will stay neutral in the process of in-house change.

It is also evaluating whether it can trust PPP that had backed out of the Murree Declaration signed between Nawaz Sharif and Asif Ali Zardari in 2008. It also proposes that the opposition parties should first bring a no-trust motion against Senate Chairman Sadiq Sanjra-ni, which according to it will show whether 'powerful quarters' are staying away from the political affairs.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) has already announced it would hold long march against the Imran-led government on 23 March. But it has not made it clear whether the component parties of PDM would tender resignations from the assemblies at that time.

It is also not yet known whether they will stage protest sit-in in Islamabad. Political pundits opine that this announcement has been made just to mount pressure on the government.

The political history of Pakistan bears witness no government have ever been toppled through any long march on the streets. It appears that PDM also believes that it cannot get rid of the present government by holding long march towards Islamabad.

So there is a 'plan within the plan' and the PDM is aggressively pursuing it. Former Prime Minister Shahid Khaqan Abbasi has said whenever general election is held Shahbaz Sharif would be their party candidate for the post of the prime minister.



Everyone can easily understand that he could not make such a daring statement without prior approval from Nawaz Sharif. This means the PML-N has given a clear and loud message to the 'powerful quarters' that PML-N Vice President Maryam Nawaz is now not in the race and she would stay away from it.

Maryam Nawaz is known for her aggressive politics and she always toes the line of Nawaz Sharif due to which she is not acceptable to some quarters. Now the PML-N is trying to make itself acceptable to the 'powerful quarters' that can allegedly enable it to return to power in next general elections.

But still the issue is not so simple. Many insiders claim that Shahid Khaqan Abbasi can emerge as more 'acceptable' candidate than Shahbaz Sharif due to strong family ties with certain quarters.

Insiders say Shahbaz Sharif always refused to make splinter group in the party and decided to support Nawaz Sharif against all odds. So certain quarters think that if he becomes prime minister he would always look towards Nawaz Sharif for decision-making.

So the time will show what happens within PML-N in the coming weeks. But the PML-N has made a courtesy gesture to the powers that be by unofficially presenting the name of Shahbaz Sharif as its candidate for the post of the prime minister.

Nawaz Sharif has also been holding meetings with former finance minister Ishaq Dar to get to know about the real economic landscape of Pakistan.

Some opposition parties and active 'players' want PML-N to show its willingness for in-house change but it thinks that there are many 'ifs and buts' that must be addressed. Otherwise it will not jump blindly into the fray.

PML-N is really concerned about economic situation and it thinks that the people will expect a lot from next government whether it will be a temporary regime after in-house change or a permanent government as a result of the general elections.

If the PML-N agrees to become part of the efforts to bring in-house change then it may seek solid 'guarantees' that in case of in-house change the new prime minister would announce fresh general elections after carrying out necessary legislation in the parliament in a clearly defined interim period.

The leadership of PML-N has no interest in joining any interim set up after in-house change. So if it agrees for in-house change then it will seek guarantees that the political parties forming the new government will not stress for completion of constitutional term of the national and provincial assemblies and instead focus on holding new general elections in the country.

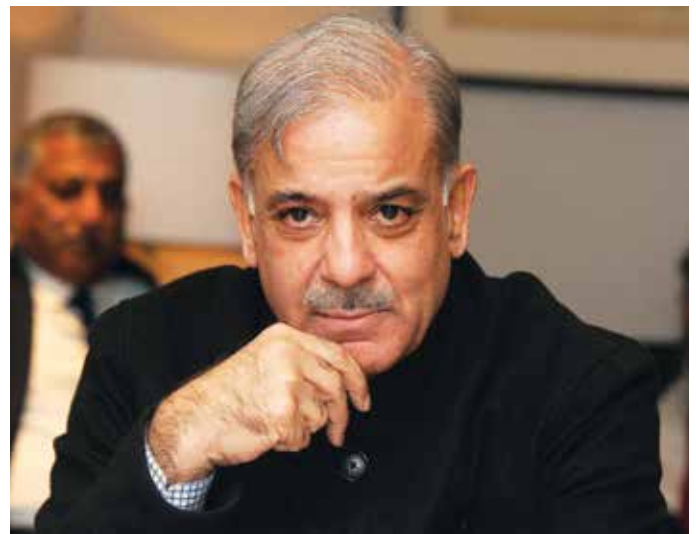
This is only one side of the picture because on the other side Prime Minister Imran Khan is closely monitoring the political situation and preparing for a big political war against his opponents.

He is likely to cash in on some critical issues that can generate public sentiments in his favour. He will not step back from his 'absolutely not' approach while dealing with the United States. He will also rule out chances of mutual trade with India besides adopting pro-Taliban strategy to win support among Pashtoons.

He will increase his political support base through giving right to vote to overseas Pakistanis. He will continue to seek sympathies of the people through some relief projects like Ehsaas Programme and Health Card.

Last but not least he will continue to repeat his 'chor-dakoo' mantra that the leaders of both PML-N and PPP are corrupt and they have pushed the country into the troubled waters due to their corruption and bad governance.

Prime Minister Imran Khan is a born fighter and he showed it throughout his cricket career. He also recently tweeted his picture in which he was sweating too much during a cricket match. There was also a message with this picture for his followers urging them to not lose heart and show determination to achieve desired results.



Insiders claimed if the opposition parties try to bring a no-confidence motion against Prime Minister Imran Khan he will do whatever he can in his capacity and will give a tough fight to them. The close aides of Imran Khan are believed to have said in private meetings that once he is removed from his post he would be too 'dangerous' for the opponent parties.

The political circles believe that the opposition parties lack capacity to topple the government through any long march towards Islamabad. So they would put in their best efforts to bring in-house change and install an interim set up for a specific time period. The PML-N and Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam-Fazl (JUI-F) want early elections while PPP is still not ready to prematurely lose its government in the Sindh province.

The difference of opinion on important political issues among the opposition parties has always worked to the advantage of the Khan government that has had relatively easy time despite its unsatisfactory performance in last three years.

Political commentators are of the view that neutral role of the 'powerful quarters' can go in favour of the opposition and spell curtain for the Khan government. But it is yet to see whether the visibly splintered opposition can sit together and forge a unified front to win their political fight against the government.





# Khan's Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa Debacle

*The rout in KP local polls is warning signal because this was where Imran Khan's PTI first rose as a viable political force*



By Syed Fakhar KaKaKhel

The chips have been counted – and the winner if Maulana Fazlur Rehman, the bitterest rival of Prime Minister Imran Khan.

The first phase of Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa local government election has assumed a symbolic importance for obvious reasons, and some political pundits are rushing to conclude that this is the beginning of the end of the ascendancy of Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI).

Local elections were held in 17 districts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa On 19 December 2021. All sides agree it was a warm-up tournament for the general election, which the Maulana's Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI) managed to carry up in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

After PTI's loss, the election results are being presented as if it was the biggest arena in the political history of Pakistan.

The JUI-F won the city mayor of Peshawar, the provincial capital, and the

ANP candidate won the Mardan city mayor, the province's second-largest city. Following the PTI's defeat in these two major cities, the PTI's popularity is being debated across the country.

The ruling party, which was once very vocal against dynasty or hereditary politics, fielded a whole battery of dynastic candidates, only one of whom managed to win his seat. From Newshehra son of Defense Minister Pervez Khattak won his seat.

All candidates fielded by PTI's federal and provincial ministers tasted defeat. It is indeed a major blow to the ruling party at the home ground where it has been in power for more than eight years now.

On the other hand, the number of votes received by the PTI is nothing short of a miracle. If so many votes are cast for PTI despite the wholesale destruction, ruin, corruption, and mismanagement that its rule has unleashed, that means something.

Prime Minister Imran Khan himself has blamed ticket-awarding bodies of his party though other of his comrades have blamed inflation as a major cause for their defeat since the prime minister himself is responsible for inflation, he blamed the distribution of party tickets for the defeat.

On the other hand, analysts believe that the real vote of PTI is less than what they got in this election. This also included the votes they got through the support of their government machinery, so if they get fewer votes in the future, then this would be their real vote bank.

If we look at the performance of Awami National Party (ANP), its supporters are disappointed with the party's performance, but if the statistics are examined, it is clear that the party's vote bank is intact.

The ANP thought that the voter would swing to their boxes after disappointment from the PTI. But JUI shocked them as much as it shocked PTI. Apart from that,



ANP retained the party's loyal vote bank in the recent elections. However, due to local differences like PTI, their vote could not be used in their favor.

If there is any political party that is being affected by the situation in Afghanistan that is the Awami National Party which was once again the target of terrorism. In the local body elections, an ANP candidate for the city was targeted and killed in Dera Ismail Khan while an ANP vehicle was attacked in Bajaur killing two of its staunch supporters.

The performance of the PPP was disappointing, but until a few years ago, it seemed that PPP has restricted itself to Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa was no more on their horizon.

The party that had once considered the province its bastion is on the verge of extinction. The Jamaat-e-Islami performed better than PPP in the recent elections. This is despite the fact that PPP held successful rallies in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa participated by Bilawal Bhutto Zardari.

Overall, it is safe to say PPP needs to work harder. It needs to reorganize and re-connect to the public for the upcoming general elections. Even the slightest disturbance in the pace at which it has slowly gained momentum could prove politically fatal for them.

The performance of Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) has remained the same as its actual vote bank was in the province.

However, due to the closeness of the PDM, his vote also fell to the JUI in the form of a support vote. It is worth mentioning that for the city mayor JUI and PMLN joined hands by nominating Maulana Fazlur Rahman's son-in-law for the mayor of Peshawar. That is how they won the provincial capital.

As far as the strategy of the Jamiat Ulema-e-Islam concerned they played their cards very well. In their strategy, there is a lesson for the rest of the parties. Irrespective of how its newfound political clout works vis-à-vis the Taliban regime in Afghanistan in the coming months, it is wrong to link its current success with the Afghan situation in the local elections.

In particular, it must be remembered that the JUI-F is a democratic political party while the Afghan Taliban consider democracy a manifestation of western culture and they simply hate it.

In a democracy, politics is based on two things: Firstly, what the people think and believe about you and your platform, and secondly, how you connect the people with you and your platform. This whole process starts from the head and moves to the thumb on Election Day.

With the formation of the current government and JUI's decision to be the hardest opposition, it kept its workers busy on the streets. It appeared on the national horizon with a clear statement as the Maulana left no pitch to oppose and fight.

JUI's greatest asset is the committed youth cadre of voters, swelling annually by new cohorts of fresh graduates from its seminaries.

Equally important, it has the backing of ideologically allied wealthy gentlemen who are ready for any sacrifice if need be.

When the election drum beats, the Maulana pick people with squeaky-clean images, mostly from mosques and seminaries. In the recent elections, there were many candidates fielded by Maulana who never wished to enter politics but they followed the decision, as it was their religious duty. Then there is the pulpit for communication through which JUI's followers get a chance to talk to the people directly every Friday.

Under the MMA rule, this scribe is a witness to the fact that no matter what happens, the JUI chief minister and ministers would be in regular public access. Their perception among the public is that they are easily accessible. The JUI leadership is fully aware of this fact.

In contrast, PTI's dependence on social media has cut them off from the public. There is an impression among the public that Bani Gala runs the province and in eight years the party has not fulfilled the promises they made.

After the devastating results, the Prime Minister expressed his anger over the provincial government. He has also asked to constitute a fact-finding committee to probe the defeat. Political circles believe that after defeat in the first phase the provincial government will leave no stone unturned to get maximum seats in the second phase. Eighteen districts of the province are ready for the second phase of the battle on 16 January 2022.







# Who Wants Sindh Local Government Polls Postponed?

*A government-opposition tussle over a new local government's law could potentially hinder local government election*



By Azfar Ashfaq

Almost all opposition parties in Pakistan's Sindh province have united in their rejection of a new legislative proposal from the provincial government because, they say, it would render the local governments impotent.

Remarkably, their opposition to the purported local government law is so strong that it has completely overcome the myriad rivalries and divides among opposition ranks, including the infamous urban-rural divide. Not a single opposition party has broken ranks to back former President Asif Zardari's Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) government.

Traditionally, the PPP and once-unified Muttahida Qaumi Movement were thought to be the sole representatives respectively of rural and urban areas of Sindh, because of their vote bank and mass support. For years, these parties have been supporting each other openly and tacitly.

Initially, the MQM was PPP's coalition partner in the provincial government and when it decided to sit on the opposition benches, it had its mayors and chairman of Karachi, Hyderabad and Mirpurkhas from August 2015 to August 2020. Both parties had off and on used their respective ethnic credentials for political advantage.

But the emergence of new players like the Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) and Pak Sarzameen Party (PSP) as well as Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) has changed the dynamics of Karachi and Sindh because. The three parties named above advocate for the rights of urban Sindh without resort to ethnic feelings, making the appeal to ethnicity largely irrelevant.

The PPP, therefore, has new stakeholders to deal with along with the old ones. Even the Grand Democratic Alliance (GDA) whose support base is rural, the Awami National Party (ANP) and Pakistan Muslim League -

Nawaz (PML-N) have joined hands with the rest of the opposition against the local government law of the PPP.

It all began on 26 November when the Sindh Local Government (Amendment) Bill 2021 was bulldozed in the provincial assembly by the ruling PPP amid a boycott of the opposition parties. The bill amended the Sindh Local Government Act of 2013 which currently underpins local governments across the province.

The PPP had in 2013 already deprived the LG organisations of several key functions including water and sewerage, picking up garbage, master plan, building control, etc.

The new law divests local governments of the functions of basic health and education; changes the procedure for the election of mayor from 'show of hands' to secret ballot; and inserts a clause to allow any non-elected person to run for mayor or chairmen.





The MQM-P, PTI, GDA, JI and PSP announced their separate agitations against the bill and all of them have urged Sindh Governor Imran Ismail not to give his assent to the new bill.

As per constitutional requirement, the bill was sent to the governor, who citing 10 objections returned it to the Sindh Assembly for reconsideration.

While the protests against the new bill continued, Mustafa Kamal-led PSP and local PTI chapter separately challenged the bill before the Sindh High Court. Terming it a black law, the MQM-P convened an All-Party Conference and the PTI summoned an All Stakeholders moot.

For the first time in many years, PPP leadership has shown signs of frustration as the opposition's protest keep growing as they rejected any talks until the withdrawal of the controversial legislation.

One instance of this frustration overflowing into public discourse was a statement by Sindh Chief Minister Murad Ali Shah, in which he reminded the people of urban Sindh they were in minority, and asserted his party would continue to take decisions for them. Another instance was PPP Chairman Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari heaping scorn on those opposing the bill.

Eyebrows were raised on the CM's statement who while pointing to the opposition in the house after the passage of the bill again on 11 December said: "Do you want people from Islamabad to occupy Sindh? The people of Sindh will never allow such an occupation.

"Yes, we are part of Pakistan and we should be considered a part of Pakistan. Don't create a situation that people start to think about something different. You are in minority and will remain in minority and can never take decisions."

That same day, some 14 political parties rejected the law at the MQM-P's APC. The next day, dozens of parties and representatives of trade and industry also rejected the law passed by the PPP and demanded a powerful LG system.

The beleaguered PPP tried to give an ethnic colour to the protest against LG law by targeting the MQM-P alone as if it's the

only representative of the urban people. But this ruse failed as other parties made it clear advocacy for the rights of the third tier of governments had no ethnic undertones.

These parties clearly mention that they are demanding for the rights of the people of Karachi to Kashmore. On 19 December, the JI staged an impressive rally in which its chief Sirajul Haq rejected the LG law and vowed to continue his party's struggle until the proposal is retracted.

As the bill became a law on Dec 23 and the opposition's movement refused to die down, the beleaguered PPP extended another olive branch to the opposition when Local Government Minister Nasir Shah told a press conference that the amended law was not a holy scripture and that the government was ready for talks to accommodate changes.



"We have given more powers to the local bodies through the new law," says Sindh Information Minister Saeed Ghani. "Opposition is doing negative propaganda but actually we give future Karachi mayor a role in the Karachi Water and Sewerage Board and Sindh Solid Waste Management Board.

"Even we removed the condition of secret ballot for mayoral election on the recommendation of the governor. We are open for talks and we will welcome positive suggestions from stakeholders."

But the opposition does not agree.

"Sindh government has taken control of Karachi Medical and Dental College, Abbasi Shaheed Hospital, Karachi Institute of Heart Diseases, and many other hospitals and schools from Karachi Metropolitan Corporation", says Federal Minister for IT and Telecom Aminul Haque of the MQM-P.

"It refused to give the function of lifting of garbage to the municipal organisation across the province. The champion of democracy and 18th Amendment doesn't want to devolve powers at the grassroots level".

Other opposition parties while rejecting the LG bill ask the Sindh government to take back the legislation and form a broad-based body comprising all stakeholders to draw up recommendation for an empowered

local government system for the province in accordance with Article 140-A of the Constitution. Until then, they are not ready for talks.

With the fate of the PPP's LG law hangs in the balance due to legal challenges and the opposition's ongoing protest campaign, chances are slim that the local government election can take place in Sindh anytime soon. Perhaps, this is what some stakeholders want.

پھر کیوں نہیں اس شہر میں کوئی ظلم کی معیاد

یارب تو نے جب دے ڈالی ہر شے کو فنا



وزیر خزانہ پاکستان جناب شوکت ترین

# تجاویز برائے ریئل اسٹیٹ سیکٹر



وزیر اعظم پاکستان جناب عمران خان

جناب وزیر اعظم صاحب!

ہم آپ کی توجہ ایک اہم ملکی مسئلے کی طرف دلانا چاہتے ہیں۔

1 / ایف بی آر ویلویویشن جس پرفیڈرل گورنمنٹ گین ٹیکس رائڈ وائس ٹیکس لیتی ہے۔

2 / ڈی سی ریٹس جس پر صوبائی حکومتیں سٹپ ڈیوٹی لیتی ہیں۔

3 / کنٹونمنٹ بورڈ ہر کینٹ میں اپنی ویلویویشن کے مطابق اپنے ٹیکس لیتے ہیں۔

4 / مارکیٹ ریٹس جو حالات کے مطابق اور گورنمنٹ پالیسی کی وجہ سے اوپر نیچے ہوتے رہتے ہیں۔

ملک میں اس وقت  
پراپرٹی ویلویویشن کے  
چار طریقے رائج ہیں:

ان چاروں مختلف ریٹس کی وجہ سے عام آدمی کو ہر وقت ایک کنفیوژن رہتی ہے۔ اس کی حالیہ مثال ایف بی آر ویلویویشن ٹیکس کا یکم دسمبر 2021 کو اجراء ہے جس کی وجہ سے ریئل اسٹیٹ مارکیٹ اور کنسٹرکشن انڈسٹری شدید بحران کا شکار ہوئی تاہم آپ کی بروقت مداخلت سے اس بحران سے نکلنے کی امید پیدا ہوئی ہے۔ چیئر مین ایف بی آر نے حال ہی میں سینٹ کی قائمہ کمیٹی برائے خزانہ میں اعتراف کیا ہے کہ ایف بی آر کے پاس پراپرٹی کی ویلویویشن کے لیے کوئی طریقہ کار وسائل نہیں ہیں۔ ایف بی آر انکم ٹیکس آرڈیننس 2021 کی سیکشن (4) 68 کے تحت پراپرٹی ویلویویشن کر رہا ہے جو کہ اس ادارے کا کام ہی نہیں ہے۔

جناب وزیر اعظم! آپ سے اپیل ہے کہ اس مسئلے کے مکمل حل اور آئندہ کسی بحران سے بچنے کیلئے درج ذیل تجاویز پر عمل کیا جائے۔

1 / انکم ٹیکس آرڈیننس 2001 کی سیکشن (4) 68 کو فوری طور پر ختم کیا جائے۔

2 / پراپرٹی ویلویویشن کا کام صرف صوبوں پر چھوڑ دیا جائے جو پہلے سے ہی یہ کام کر رہے ہیں اور ان کے پاس اس کام کو کرنے کیلئے فیلڈ فورس ریونیوڈ پارٹمنٹ کی صورت میں موجود ہے، جو کہ اس کام کو بخوبی کرنے کی صلاحیت رکھتی ہے۔

3 / صوبوں کے تعین کردہ ڈی سی ریٹس پر صوبے اپنی سٹپ ڈیوٹی وصول کریں اور انہی ریٹس پر وفاقی حکومت گین ٹیکس رائڈ وائس ٹیکس وصول کرے۔

4 / پراپرٹی ویلویویشن ہر بجٹ سے پہلے ایک ہی بار ہونی چاہیے اور مالی سال کے دوران اچانک ویلویویشن تبدیل کرنے کا سلسلہ بند ہونا چاہیے۔

◀ ان اقدام سے ملک میں ریئل اسٹیٹ سیکٹر میں موجودہ کنفیوژن ختم ہوگی اور آپ کے اعلان کردہ کنسٹرکشن انڈسٹری چیک کے ذریعے ملکی معیشت کی بحالی اور ریونیو میں اضافہ ہوگا۔

◀ ہمارے ادارے اور قوانین اور بیرون ملک مقیم پاکستانیوں کے سامنے جگہ بنائی سے بھی محفوظ ہوں گے۔



**Muhammad Ahsan Malik**

General Secretary (RECA)-DHA Islamabad-Rawalpindi

VP (Punjab)-Federation of Realtors (FOR) Pakistan

Cell: 03008560201, Whats App: 0321-8560201

**Real Estate Consultants Association (RECA) DHA Islamabad-Rawalpindi**

Office No- 24, 2nd Floor, Sector-C, Street No-06, Commercial Center, Phase-2, DHA Islamabad, 051-5161601-02



# Debates, Controversies, and Clashes

*Parliamentary year in review*



By Sarfraz Raja

**P**arliament in session is parliament on public exhibition while parliament at work is parliament in its committee rooms, it is said, as house debates while committees legislate.

Heated debates, frequent exchange of harsh statements, physical clashes, controversial and record-breaking legislation – it was all part of parliamentary business during the calendar year 2021. In fact, this was the most active and aggressive year of present assembly.

## Record time legislation

We had never witnessed passage of more than one and a half dozen bills in little time but we did in present assembly when government bulldozed about 20 bills in less than half an hour. This sparked strong protest and anger from the opposition and sequentially a no confidence move against deputy speaker Qasim Khan Suri who was chairing session and conducted passage of those bills.

But later after assurance from government side to withdraw those bills the motion against deputy speaker was withdrawn.

Besides that, more than fifty percent of the total numbers of bills passed by recent assembly were passed during 2021 that is 61 out of 110 total passed bills.

As PTI government is not enjoying majority in both houses and in upper house opposition parties are in majority many bills passed by National Assembly could not get approval from senate. So government had to table those bills in joint sitting of both houses.

## Legislation in joint sitting

In November 2021, in a joint sitting government succeeded to get approval of 31 bills which were either lapsed or rejected by senate that includes some controversial ones including election reforms bill to launch much debated electronic voting machines in coming elections and to facilitate overseas voters to vote from country of their residence.

Also part of the package was an international court of justice bill to give right of appeal to Kalbhushan Jadev, the Indian RAW spy arrested in Pakistan; and a bill to give more autonomy to State Bank of Pakistan.

These bills were strongly opposed by opposition parties blaming government for introducing EVMs to rig elections and for doing some person specific legislation to give relief to Indian spy Kalbhushan Jadev and to surrender government's authority to IMF by empowering State Bank.

However, despite strong protest and opposition, government were able to pass these bills with the help of allied parties who were initially opposing these bills but later agreed to support this legislation and subsequently these bills became act of parliament.

## Unfortunate and embarrassing

Press gallery witnessed some scene and situations on floor of the house which were actually against parliamentary norms and embarrassing for everyone. Especially during the budget session, budget documents became weapons to hit opponents with and both sides used these heavy books carrying details of utilization of public money which injured members of both sides including a few women members and sergeants at arms.



The nation watched this fight on screens where few ministers were jumping on their tables throwing budget documents using inappropriate language. Opposition leader Shahbaz Sharif was also hit by these books directly during his budget debate speech.

Speaker and deputy speaker remains target of opposition alleging them to give favor to government benches and during that some harsh and unparliamentarily words were exchanged about speaker by some senior opposition members like Shahid Khaqan Abbasi.

Many times protesting opposition members while chanting slogans surrounded chair of leader of house and government members surrounded chair of leader of opposition during their speeches.

## Lack of members' interest

Members especially from government side remain least interested in attending assembly sittings and this was from top as leader of the house Mr Prime Minister attended very few sessions and his attendance was below all his predecessors.

As per a report by FAFEN (Free and Fair Election Network), Imran Khan attended less session even than former PM Nawaz Sharif who had attended just 17 percent of sittings while Imran Khan attended just 10 percent of sittings in same period of time.

Yusuf Raza Gillani is at top of the list with maximum attendance of 97 percent in National Assembly sittings as prime minister. So lack of interest was shown from top to bottom and many times to maintaining quorum became a big issue for government during some important proceedings. This lack of interest also lead to a rare and embarrassing defeat for government on a private member's bill despite having majority in the house.

Another unusual practice witnessed was debate on presidential address. At the beginning of every parliamentary year president addresses both Houses of Parliament in a joint sitting. After that, the government initiates a debate in National Assembly to discuss presidential address, which ends on a resolution of thanks.

But after president's address at the start of

third parliamentary year, debate was opened by opposition member Khawaja Muhammad Asif but no other member from either side was given opportunity to speak on this motion and at closing days of parliamentary year a resolution of thanks was passed in a hurry.

## Important happenings In Senate

Upper house's most important event of the year was election to half of the seats and then election of chairman and deputy chairman. In the latter contest, opposition lost despite majority and government-supported Sadiqe Sanjrani of ally Baluchistan Awami Party became chairman of upper house for his consecutive second three years term beating joint opposition candidate Yusuf Raza Gillani of PPP. Simultaneously, Mirza Muhammad Afridi elected as deputy chairman defeating JUI's Maulana Abdul Ghafoor Haidari.



Another surprise was nomination of Yusuf Raza Gillani as leader of opposition with the help and signatures of five senators who actually belonged to government benches. This triggered a controversy among opposition.

Senate witnessed some fiery debates as well on burning political issues and government performance and joint opposition successfully become hurdle in passage of some important government bills. However, at the end of the year, despite opposition majority government were able to defeat opposition in passing a bill related to media reforms.

As per the record available on official website a total of 46 bills passed by senate of Pakistan during the year 2021.

## Closure of press gallery

During presidential address to join sitting of both houses first time in parliamentary history press gallery remained closed and media persons were not allowed to cover the proceedings. Journalists staged a protest outside parliamentary gate.

A few days later while talking to media persons, speaker Asad Qaiser backed his decision and told that it was made in consultation with parliamentary reporters body PRA.

A PRA spokesman later denied this claim but closure of media gallery no doubt was a controversial move never witnessed before.

## In camera briefings

Members of parliament from all parties were briefed by top military brass in an in camera meeting of national security committee in parliament house in

November regarding emerging security issues within country and region especially talks with Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) and about negotiations and agreement between government and Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan (TLP) after their weeks-long protest march, and sit in.

Opposition leader Shehbaz Sharif and other parliamentary party leaders participated in this meeting but Prime Minister Imran Khan remained absent. Consequently, opposition parties boycotted the next in camera meeting of security committee held in December.

# Battered and Bruised but Plodding On

*A high-level look at how Pakistan's economy fared in 2021*

## Desk Report

Although 2021 was a tough year from the common Pakistani's point of view, the country's economy continued to grow at a higher-than-expected rate during the year, so much so that at one point, the government had to ponder ways to check growth to prevent the economy from overheating.

Here is a high-level look at some of the major drivers and determinants of the trajectory of Pakistan's economy this year.

## Working with the IMF

There is no denying that Pakistan's macroeconomic fundamentals are in a bad shape, and the government had its hands full dealing with this area of concern.

This was one of the reasons Pakistan had to approach the International Monetary Fund (IMF) for a USD 6 billion Extended Fund Facility (EFF) in the first place in 2021.

Keeping the EFF program on track exerted the government throughout the year. Early in the year, Pakistan held talks with the IMF to put the program back on track. A staff-level agreement over reforms was reached in February and the Fund agreed to release around \$500 million in funds the following month.

However, the reform measures agreed to put the program back on track were tough: a steep hike of electricity tariffs, imposition of new taxes to the tune of Rs140bn, and unprecedented autonomy for the central bank.

Discussions with the IMF for the sixth review of the program started in October but were characterised by an unprecedented lack of clarity as the finance ministry chose to stay silent on the status of the program, which some speculated had been derailed.

The government was meanwhile making haste slowly on the legislative front concerning the two laws it had agreed to enact, one concerning taxes and the other about grant of autonomy to the central bank.

An announcement came on 22 November that a staff-level agreement had been struck with the Fund over the sixth review. However, the Fund mandated the government securing parliamentary approval for the putative laws before its executive board could approve the USD 1 billion next tranche of the program.

Meanwhile, the opposition assailing the lack of transparency over the agreements and vowed to oppose a planned mini-budget — to implement fiscal adjustments and expenditure cuts worth about Rs600bn as part of an understanding with the IMF.

As we go to the press, the government is scrambling poised to table the two legislative proposals in parliament, hoping to secure parliamentary approval in time for an IMF executive board meeting reportedly scheduled for 12 January 2022.



Another area where Pakistan must satisfy the IMF to gain unfettered access to global capital markets is the country's dealings with the Fund's Financial Action Task Force (FATF).

The watchdog put Pakistan under "increased monitoring" in February. FATF President Dr Marcus Pleyer said while Islamabad had made "significant progress", there remained some "serious deficiencies" in mechanisms to plug terrorism financing.

Three of the 27 points raised by FATF remained to be addressed at this point, all others having been resolved to the watchdog's satisfaction. At the next review, which came around the FATF's June plenary, only one of the points of action remain outstanding, but Pakistan remained on the grey list.

As well, in an unprecedented move, Pakistan was asked to address all items on a parallel action plan handed to Islamabad by the watchdog's Asia Pacific Group (APG) in 2019 before it could be whitelisted.

The next FATF review came in October, which concluded with Pleyer saying Islamabad had addressed 30 out of the 34 points of action on the two concurrent action plans, but Pakistan still languishing on the grey list. The next FATF review is set for February 2022.

## Saudi support package

In a good new this year, Saudi Arabia agreed to revive its financial support to Pakistan, including about \$3bn in safe deposits and \$1.2bn worth of oil supplies on deferred payments.

Authorities said the budgetary support will help the balance of payment of Pakistan in the backdrop of rising commodity prices globally. In November, the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) signed an agreement with the Saudi Fund for Development to receive the \$3bn deposit.

A press release issued on the occasion said the deposit would help support Pakistan's foreign currency reserves and contribute towards resolving the adverse effects of the Covid-19 pandemic. On 4 December, Adviser to the Prime Minister on Finance and Revenue Shaukat Tarin announced the SBP had received the deposit.

## Workers' remittances

Perhaps the brightest spot for Pakistan's economy during 2021 was that expat workers remittances are on track to break all previous records.

Over the 10-month period from July 2020 to April 2021, workers' remittances soared to an unprecedented \$24.2bn, up by 29pc compared with the same period last year and already surpassing the level achieved over the whole of the previous fiscal year by \$1bn.

Remittances offer the much needed fiscal space to Pakistan's cash-strapped economy. They help offset the import bill and ease pressure on the country's precious forex reserves.

The government claimed credit for the development, with SBP issuing statement to the media lauding the government policy. A World Bank report seemed to concur when it said remittances were likely to remain flat at the present levels in 2022 as the one-off effect of government incentives to attract them started to fade.

## The twin deficits

Fuelled by a trade deficit spike fuelled by surging imports in the early parts of the year, Pakistan's current account deficit (CAD) returned to haunt the economy in 2021. The CAD stood at \$229 million for January, \$50m in February, \$33m in March, and \$200m, before soaring to a staggering \$650m in May \$1.644bn in June.

The June CAD, the highest monthly deficit in FY21, meant Pakistan ended the fiscal year with a large CAD of \$1.8bn. It then rose further to about \$1.5bn in August and \$1.6bn in October.

The SBP said on 20 December CAD for the first five months of the current fiscal year stood at \$7bn. November saw the highest monthly current account deficit at \$1.91bn since July 2018 when it had reached \$2.1bn. In all, year 2021 saw Pakistan suffer a record \$20bn CAD.

## The slide of the rupee

Although the rupee started the year 2021 on a positive note, it slid to record lows against the dollar as the year progressed. In the first quarter of the year, the rupee was seen rallying, gaining 3.27pc against the dollar in March alone, when it was trading at a 22-month high.

However, the dollar resumed its upward trajectory in May, hitting a nine-month low against the dollar at Rs163.67 on 2 August, and continuing to slide further until it sank to Rs178.4 to a dollar on 24 December.

## Price hike and inflation

Continued slide of the rupee and soaring energy prices continued to push inflation ever higher, adding to the burden of economic hardship of the citizenry.

While it eased to 5.65pc in January from 8pc the previous month, inflation began to increase soon after, mainly driven by double-digit growth in food inflation in both urban and rural areas, reaching 8.7pc in February, 9.1pc in March, and 11.1pc in April.

After remaining somewhat steady around that level, it edged up again in November to 11.5pc, this time boosted by a record hike in fuel prices the previous month. This was the highest increase in inflation recorded in 20 months.

The worst overall inflationary pressure, however, came from the massive rupee depreciation, which pushed import prices upward.

But perhaps the worst direct impact of inflation felt by the masses came from fuel price hikes, eliciting public anger and desolation.

The series of energy price hikes seen over the year started with a Rs3.2 per litre increase in the price of petrol on 15 January – the third time fuel prices had been increased in four weeks.



Several similar increases followed and a Rs5.4 increase on July 15 took the petrol price to Rs118.09 per litre. The public was left dazed after the government hiked petrol price by Rs10.49 per litre 16 October. On November 4, petrol price was again hiked by Rs8.14, taking it to Rs145.82 per litre.

While the government cited higher oil prices in the international markets for these price increases, analysts said they had been necessitated by Islamabad's understanding with the IMF programme.

Sporadic gas shortages have further afflicted the masses and hurt the economy. In June, two state-owned companies announced complete closure of gas supply to industries and CNG stations.

The reasons cited for this outage, which the announcement said would continue until 5 July, was a decline in gas availability, low pressure in the system, and dry docking of the LNG terminal.

In November, the Cabinet Committee on Energy said gas supply to the CNG sector would be curtailed.

The level of hardship for the common citizen was further heightened by the government's failure to ensure uninterrupted supply of gas during the winter months of peak demand. Already in December, domestic consumers in several parts of the country were complaining of gas supply outages and dips.

A Dawn report said two state-owned foreign suppliers had gone back on their earlier commitment to deliver two vessels in February. Pakistani authorities were able to salvage one of the two vessels through high-level diplomatic contacts. The vessel committed for the second half of February, however, will not be delivered.



# Year 2021 in Review: The Pakistani Cyberspace

*A lookback at the topics and trends that defined the Pakistani social media in 2021*

By Amna Shoaib

Another year has gone by, another year characterised by Covid restrictions and shutdowns and precautionary measures. We saw new variants of the killer bug rise and science ride to the rescue with new vaccines and booster shots.

And yet there was so much else happening around the year – especially on social media. We Pakistanis are a chatty lot and social platforms like Twitter bring out the best (and the worst) in us.

Below, The Truth International (TTI) presents a birds-eye-view of what topics, conversations, and controversies that preoccupied the Pakistan chattering classes this year.

## The tragic saga of Ali Sadpara

Early in the year, there were reports of Ali Sadpara attempting a winter ascent of K2, the fabled killer mountain. In February, Pakistan's pluckiest mountaineer went missing on his way to the summit along with her two associates.

Social media remained honed in on Sadpara's fate for weeks, with people praying for his safety – until his son confirmed he had died around the treacherous Bottleneck, probably on his return after summiting K2.

He was mourned by the nation, with people remembering his professionalism as well as his good nature.



## Women's issues

Given how patriarchy has a stranglehold of public discourse in our country and how vocal bitter pockets of opposition to it are, women's issues continued to dominate public discourse across the Pakistani social media this year.

The year opened on a positive note when netizens in large numbers hailed a Lahore High Court (LHC) ruling in January declaring the reprehensible two-finger test of virginity illegal.

Activists had long opposed this so-called test as an outrage against the dignity of rape victims and without any scientific basis or forensic value. Justice Ayesha Malik of LHC in a 30-page judgment agreed, and ruled it was illegal, unconstitutional.

A storm of anger and indignation rose after videos of a dark act of mass harassment of a woman TikToker, on the Independence Day of all days and in Lahore's Greater Iqbal Park of all places, went viral.

In the clips, about 400 men were seen mobbing and indecently touching and handling the woman and physically threatening her companions. While the incident caused nationwide consternation, there was no death of those blaming the victim for the outrage.



In July, Noor Mukkadam's murder shook the nation and calls seeking #JusticeforNoor trended for days. Her heinous murder overshadowed the equally brutal killing Qurat-ul-Ain, a mother of four, who was a victim of domestic violence at the hands of her husband.

Outrage broke out again later that week when the culprit from the Khadija case was released after completing a jail term many saw as light in comparison to his crime.

September again saw women's issues rise to the surface across the Pakistani social media space when it was reported Karachi's IBA had expelled a student for going public with an incident of alleged harassment he saw on campus.

Mohammad Gibrail, who said in a Facebook post he saw a male employee of the varsity harassed a female employee who worked under his supervision, was widely hailed as a hero.

## Religion, culture, and propriety

Culture continued to be the hottest battlefield over social media throughout the year, as did the interpretation of religion and its application to the public sphere. An allied subject for social propriety.

Early in the year, the internet went berserk after a viral video showed two women who co-own an Islamabad restaurant mocking the English language skills of their manager.

The duo earned endless ire of the Twitterati for what was variously perceived as their elitism, class privilege, and colonial hangover, and calls to boycott their restaurants trended for days on end.

Again, fierce debates raged for days on end after a Lahore university expelled a girl student was seen in multiple viral videos going down on her knee to ask a fellow student's hand in marriage, who then hugged her.

Also this year, a Sindh lawmaker's legislative proposal for marriage to be mandatory at 18 stirred a lot of social media controversy. The object of the initiative, according to the lawmaker concerned, was to stem "societal ills, child rapes, immoral activities and crime".

Then there was the storm raised by model Sadaf Kanwal's take on feminism and a woman's role in a marriage. Among the inanities she vocalised was an assertion that "our husbands are our culture", for which she was widely ridiculed.

The year concluded with perhaps the biggest outrage of all when it was reported a staff member of Karachi's Delizia had refused to write 'Merry Christmas' on a cake for religious reasons.

Senior management at Delizia later told media it was the act of an individual and had nothing to do with company policy but the anger caused by the distasteful event continues to rankle as we go to press.



## Premier cringefest

Prime Minister Imran Khan's prowess for cringy and inappropriate public remarks reached new heights this year.

In one of his moral sermons delivered in March 2021, he showed the temerity to blame rape on temptation caused by how people dress – and was promptly taken to the cleaners.

Several Twitterati in particular reminded him how rapists continued to target fully veiled women, children, and animals, and how not even death shroud had been good enough to guard against rape in some cases.

Khan returned to the subject with the same old views in June, and faced the people's wrath again with civil society activists, journalists, and citizens alike schooling him in the precepts of civilisation.

Day of shame in Sialkot

Red hot anger spread all over Pakistan after a mob of religious bigots lunched a Sri Lankan factory manager in Sialkot, and the social media duly reflected the indignation.

The fury only multiplied when it surfaced in invagination that the lynch mob had been drummed up by some disgruntled factory workers because the manager was a strict disciplinarian.

Lay Pakistanis and dignitaries alike continued to rue the incident, lambaste its instigators and perpetrators, and console the family and the nation of the victim for days afterwards.

## A happening year in Cricket

Pakistani cricket fans were heartbroken angry over New Zealand's cancellation of a tour moments before the beginning of an ODI in Karachi, and on the quick heels of it, by England's cancellation of a prospective tour.

True to their reputation, the Pakistani twitterverse let New Zealand and England have it. There was widespread condemnation of the cricketing authorities of the two nations as well as calls for a review of cricketing ties with them.

October saw Pakistani social media break out in spontaneous celebration as the Green Shirts beat India for the first time in a T20 World Cup match, ending a losing streak that began way back in 1992.

As well as exulting in glory over the win, Pakistan social media paid close attention to a few encounters between players on and off the field.

Veteran Indian cricketer Harbhajan Singh earned universal ill will of the Pakistani cyberspace for his arrogant comments ahead of the final. Pakistan's Shoib Akhtar took the time out to send him a video response, which duly went viral.

In contrast, India captain Virat Kohli won widespread among Pakistani fans for his sporting spirit on and off the field.





# Pakistan's Endless Scramble to Keep the IMF Bailout on Track

*Making haste slowly since the staff-level agreement with the Fund has landed Islamabad in a tight spot*



By Mehtab Haider

After dithering for more than a month over how best to approach the enactment of two new laws to keep a bailout program on track, Prime Minister Imran Khan's coalition government is scrambling to accomplish the task in time for an IMF board of directors meeting scheduled for 12 January 2021.

As we go to press, the government is poised to table the two legislative proposals in the parliament to fulfil an agreed prior action as part of the sixth review of the USD 6 billion EFF.

The scramble was prompted after the IMF (International Monetary Fund) shot down a government proposal to enact the requisite laws through presidential decree instead of carrying them through the parliament, The Truth International (TTI) can report on good authority.

Pakistan reached a staff-level agreement with the IMF on 21 November 2021 on the EFF after hectic engagements of almost a month. But the government wasted more than a month making up their mind about the submission of two key bills.

The putative legislation is seen as politically problematic as one of the laws agreed to be enacted – called a mini-budget in Pakistan's legislative parlance – involves tax rate hikes and revocation of tax subsidies on scores of items while the other concerning grant of unprecedented autonomy for the country's central bank.

If enacted, the first of these is expected to unleash an avalanche of price hike to further afflict the masses already groaning under the backbreaking burden of runaway inflation. The second proposal is unpopular as it has been viewed by the majority of opinion makers as pawning the country's sovereignty to the Fund.

This is why PM Khan's coalition government is jittery about support for the twin proposals even from its allied parliamentarians, what to speak of opposition lawmakers who are opposed to his policies anyway.

Despairing of its ability to carry the proposals through the parliament, the government at a December cabinet meeting decided to go the other route: Enact the laws through presidential ordinances.

The authorities then proceeded to intimate the Fund officials of their new line of action just ahead of Christmas – who declined to go along with it, well-placed sources tell TTI.

Khan's difficulties are further compounded by the fact that these developments come at a time when his Pakistan's Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) led coalition government is entering the twilight phase of its five-year term, and the space for manoeuvring on the economic front has shrunk.

As we go to the press, the word is that the cabinet in its meeting on 28 December 2021 gave its nod for the State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Amendment Bill to be tabled for parliamentary approval but again shy away from The Tax Laws (Fourth) Amendment Bill, withdrawing it for now. The opposition on its part announced the same day it would resist the government's mini-budget. Given these constraints, the government may have to find a way to dispense with the normal procedures to secure parliamentary approval for the second legislative proposal.

The long and short of it is that



enactment of these law is as an agreed prior action for placing the IMF deal before the Fund's Executive Board meeting to secure the release of a USD 1 billion tranche under Extended Fund Facility (EFF). It is a race against the clock as government claims to have the Fund's assent for the review to be tabled at a 12 January 2022 meeting of the IMF Executive Board.

Under normal parliamentary procedures, the Finance Bill has to be tabled in both Houses of Parliament. Then the Upper House of Parliament requires at least 14 days to prepare its recommendations as normally the Senate refers this task to the Senate Standing Committee on Finance and Revenue.

Once the Upper House is through with it, it refers the proposal back to the Lower House of Parliament along with its recommendations. National Assembly then has the discretion to accept or reject Senate's recommendations and pass the Finance Bill, upon which time it becomes an Act of Parliament.

The draft mini-budget seeks withdrawal of 100 to 150 General Sales Tax (GST) exemptions, raising Withholding Tax (WHT) on telecom services from existing 10 percent to 15 percent, and bringing some other administrative changes would be bulldozed because the incumbent regime wanted to get parliamentary approval in the first week of January 2022. Only then can the IMF be intimidated of fulfilment of all agreed prior actions.

Significantly, this is the first time in the country's history that the IMF has required parliamentary approval of two bills as prior actions. In the past, it used to require mere submission of a legislative proposal.

But IMF circles say the responsibility for this situation rests with Islamabad as authorities failed to honour their earlier commitment to present SBP's Autonomy bill before the Parliament after getting additional USD 500 million in April 2021, which the Fund considers a breach of trust. In addition, a prior action left over from an earlier review automatically becomes a prior action for the next review.

The difficulties for the PTI-led regime increased manifold after the party's shocking defeat in local government elections in

certain districts of KP where the PTI has been in power for more than eight years. This inevitably set out the signal that the incumbent regime is losing its grip of power.

The passage of the mini-budget has thus become a hard nut to crack for the Imran Khan's government. If the parliament blocks any of the two legislative proposals, the IMF program may be suspended indefinitely. But Pakistani authorities believe revival of the IMF program is their only path out of the quagmire they find themselves in.

Officials argue that Pakistan's external financing requirement stands in the range of USD 27 billion over the short term and this massive external financing would simply be impossible to arrange without the full backing of the IMF.



Meanwhile, Pakistan's macroeconomic fundamentals continue to worsen. The country's Current Account Deficit (CAD) surged to USD 7.1 billion over the first five months of the current fiscal year mainly because of a sharp spike in the imports bill. The downslide of the Pakistani currency is further complicating the situation. The rupee has nosedived from PKR 152 to PKR 180 against the greenback since April 2021.

On other hand, the rising inflationary pressures have caused havoc with lives of people of Pakistan. The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) hiked its discount rate by 275 basis points in last two monetary policies in an effort to stem inflation, to little avail.

CPI-based inflation had already touched 11.5 percent in November 2021, Sensitive Price Index (SPI) inflation touched 19.5 percent on a weekly basis and Wholesale

Price Index (WPI) peaked to 27 percent for November 2021.

However, former economic advisor and member of high-profile macroeconomic group of Economic Advisory Council (EAC) Dr Ashfaq Hasan Khan says he has always advises the PM not to go the IMF because he knew Islamabad stood on the wrong side of powerful global interests so the IMF would show no leniency to Pakistan.

He recently said he has again asked the PM to ditch from the IMF program and arrange USD 3 to 4 billion financing from international markets by launching international bonds.

But the incumbent regime is in a catch 22 situation because the concerned stakeholder including the security apparatus conveyed their serious concerns

over the government's move to seek approval of Parliament on controversial SBP's Amendment Bill 2021. Against this backdrop, the government's move to table the controversial SBP amendment bill could open up a new can of worms for it.

There are no easy answers available to steer the economy out of the crisis. On the other hand, inaction at this juncture may further undermine the markets' already shaky confidence in the government. There have been clear signs in recent weeks that the Pakistan Stock Exchange, money market, and exchange rate market are not ready to buy the narrative of the incumbent regime.

The revival of IMF program can help Pakistani authorities end uncertainty at the macroeconomic level and restore the shattered confidence of the market. However, time here is of the essence – which is precisely the government is in such a bind.

# The Bitter Fruits of Economic Adhocracy

*The scaremongering by some jaded former officials could be the proverbial last straw*

By Javed Mahmood

Once again Pakistan is experiencing dollarization culture due to multiple reasons as a result of which the value of rupee is declining day by day against the US dollar and other major currencies.

A couple of months ago the State Bank of Pakistan had imposed some curbs on dollar buyers. The restrictions also included biometric verification and a ceiling on foreign currency purchases. Apparently, however, the trick did not work as dollar continued on its upward trajectory.

Therefore, on 20 December 2021, the central bank again intervened and set limits on daily and annual dollar purchases by individuals. From 21 December 2021, an individual can buy up to USD 10,000 (or any other foreign currency equal to USD 10K) in a day and a maximum of USD 100,000 in a calendar year.

The fresh intervention of the State Bank of Pakistan is an attempt to curb the ongoing phenomenon of dollarization in the country. A few weeks ago, former economic adviser Dr Ashfaq Hasan Khan disclosed that the devaluation of rupee to at least PKR 173 to a dollar was part of the upfront measures of the IMF for resumption of the suspended financial package for Pakistan.

However, the PTI government is keeping mum on this issue and dollar continues to fly high and gaining more and more value day by day.

## Causes

In Pakistan, the tendency of dollarization begins when the key economic indicators such as trade deficit, current account deficit, and foreign exchange reserves deteriorate unexpectedly beyond expectations, leading to a depreciation in the value of the Pak rupee.

During the 40-month rule of the PTI government, the US dollar had remained a favourite currency for investors and market manipulators.



When the Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) government completed its term on 31 May 2018, the dollar stood at just under PKR 117. By the time Prime Minister Imran Khan took oath of office on 18 August 2018, the greenback had appreciated to just over PKR 124.

From that moment on, the dollar assumed an upward trajectory, rising to 163 PKR by 29 June 2019 before settling at around PKR 160 by 18 August 2019. Things somewhat settled for the next six or seven months with the greenback trading at about PKR 154 on 3 March 2020.

Another roller coaster ride followed, but the dollar again looked settled at about PKR 152 by 17 May 2020. The surge that began after that date, however, has seen the dollar rise to just under PKR 180 as of 23 December 2021.

These were the days when the government was locked in negotiations with the IMF for a USD 6-billion bailout package – and its functionaries were dropping broad hints about the country being on the verge of default.

## The IMF programme

When the PTI government decided to approach IMF for taking a new loan, it formed an 18-member economic advisory

council, including ex-State Bank Governor Dr Ishrat Hussain, ex-economic adviser Dr Ashfaq H. Khan and industrialist Abdul Razak Dawood (now adviser to Prime Minister on Trade and Commerce).

For a couple of months, the PTI government could not decide whether to get a loan from IMF or not because Prime Minister Imran Khan had boasted many a times that he would prefer to die instead of begging loans from the IMF and the World.

Nonetheless, it seems the PTI government has thrown away all previous small begging bowls and got the bigger ones to get as much loans as are possible irrespective of their impact on economy, business climate and the consumers. This is evident from increase in Pakistan's foreign debt liabilities to USD 122 billion by June 2021, from USD 95 billion when PTI came to power in 2018.

In Sept/Oct 2018, the government finally announced its plan of going to IMF. To put it on record, Dr Ashfaq Hasan Khan, former economic adviser and Dean of NUST School of Social Sciences and Humanities, was the only member of 18-member EAC, who opposed the idea of getting IMF loan saying it would create more difficulties for the government, businessmen and the consumers.



However, no one listened to him and today, except the ruling class, all and sundry in the country are bearing the brunt of IMF loans-related terms and conditions which have created a Tsunami of price-hike, making life miserable for the masses.

For example, during the ongoing pandemic, governments around the world are giving relief and incentives to their people to protect them from negative impact of the Covid affects, whereas in Pakistan the government has consistently put maximum financial burden on consumers just to secure a USD 1 billion tranche laden with many stiff upfront conditions from the IMF.

Mini-budget, additional taxation of over PKR 350 billion and elimination of subsidies to save another PKR 300 billion are part of some of the upfront measures proposed by the IMF to resume financing. Frequent hike in gas, electricity and patrol rates are in addition to other measures.

## The debt burden

After becoming Prime Minister of Pakistan, Imran Khan set aside his public boastings and got as much loans as his government could from the World Bank, Asian Development Bank, and the IMF. The haphazard borrowing policy of the PTI government has led to increase in the foreign debt of Pakistan beyond USD 122 billion dollars in June 2021, from USD 95 billion when PTI came to power.

Thus, so far, the PTI government has increased foreign debt by USD 27 billion and the government is still ambitious to seek more loans.

Total national debt has ballooned to above PKR 50.5 trillion, from PKR 29.8 trillion when the PTI formed its government. Thus, the PTI government has added PKR 20.7 trillion to the national debt in three years and a quarter of fiscal year 2021-22.

By June 2018, every citizen of Pakistan, whether an infant or a senior citizen, was indebted with PKR 144,000 and by Sept 2021, this burden widened to PKR 235,000.

In percentage terms, the per capita debt surged by 63 percent or PKR 91,000 during the three years of the ruling party's government. This massive borrowing has put extra burden on debt repayment and eroded the

foreign exchange reserves and the value of the rupee and encouraged dollarization in the country.

In November 2018, the IMF disbursed the first tranche of the package. Consequently, the dollar gradually receded to PKR 150 in the inter-bank and 152 in the open market. Nonetheless, this scenario prevailed only for a few months and once again the phenomenon of dollarization returned to haunt the capital market and the dollar resumed on its upward trajectory.

Interestingly, from March-June 2021, the dollar-rupee parity remained above PKR 150 in the inter-bank but it fluctuated below PKR 160 till June 2021. Nevertheless, the fresh phase of dollarization surfaced in the country from July/Aug when the trade deficit and the current account deficit demonstrated abnormal growth.

At that time the value of dollar was around PKR 165, but it inflated to 178 in the inter-bank and beyond PKR 180 in the open market. And this is not the end as speculators are still playing with the dollar-PKR exchange rate to mint money.

The recent statement of former Chairman of FBR Shabbir Zaidi about Pakistan being a bankrupt entity and not a "going concern" has provided fresh fuel to speculators, triggering uncertainty.

A few days after the shocking disclosure of Zaidi, the State Bank of Pakistan released the latest Balance of Payment (BoP) data which showed alarming increase in the current account deficit to USD 7.24 billion in just five months of the current fiscal year while in the corresponding period of previous fiscal the current account was surplus by USD 1.7 billion.

Meanwhile, the trade deficit has widened to over USD 20 billion in the first five months of the ongoing fiscal year because of an alarming increase in imports. In November 2021, monthly imports surpassed USD 7 billion mark for the first time against USD 4.4 billion imports in the same month a year ago.

## Impact on economy

Dollarization has multiple side-effects for the economy. It promotes flight of foreign exchange, undermines investment in the

country, and leads to artificial increase in the demand for the US dollar and other foreign currencies causing extra burden on the importers, businessperson and consumers.

For example, the current spate of dollarization has reduced the profit margin of foreign investors in Pakistan Stock Exchange. Resultantly, the PSX-100 benchmark index has dropped below 44k points and has hovered around this level for many weeks. Also, Pakistan did not see any major foreign investment in recent years.

Dollarization also encourages smuggling of foreign currency and some media reports indicate flight of capital of about USD 20 million a day from Pakistan to Afghanistan and other countries. Another drawback of the tendency of dollarization is that it erodes foreign exchange reserves and bleeds the value of the Pakistani rupee.

A few weeks ago, the forex reserves with the State Bank of Pakistan fell below USD 18 billion in the backdrop of growing trade and current account deficits and unabated rise of the dollar. To strengthen the dwindling reserves, the government secured a USD 3 billion cash deposit from Saudi Arabia for a year involving four percent mark-up.

This boosted the reserves of the SBP beyond USD 20 billion around mid-December. However, despite increase in the national reserves, dollar continues to dredge the value and worth of the Pakistani rupee.

In the calendar year 2021, dollar has gained more or less PKR 18 and surged to PKR 178 in the inter-bank by December 22, 2021 and PKR 180 in the open market, from PKR 160 in the inter-bank operations in January 2021.

If the PTI government continues to bow to the IMF terms and conditions attached to the resumption of loan, the Pakistani currency will shed further value and the people can be sure of more hardship ahead.

To mend the situation, the incumbent government must give up the short-term ad-hoc approach and focus on macro-economic issues. There is no substitute for strategies that support long-term economic stability in the country.



# The Anatomy of the Gas Crisis

*Ineptitude of the incumbent government is part, not the whole, of the problem*



By **Khalique Ahmad**

As predicted by observers and analysts well ahead of time, natural gas shortages have hit Pakistan as soon as winter set in – leading to blistering criticism of Prime Minister Imran Khan’s government from all sides.

None of it means earlier gas supply arrangements were perfect. The situation was, however, aggravated by the government’s inability to secure additional LNG imports amid record-breaking global prices. On top of that, the government failed to take any pre-emptive action to stop suppliers of long-term contracts from default as shortages increased in peak demand season.

There is no guarantee either if these suppliers would not keep defaulting on their cargos throughout the coming winter months as they find substantially higher prices in the starving spot market.

The problem is rooted in the government’s failure to plan LNG imports in advance amid continuing confrontation between the power and petroleum divisions of the ministry of energy over the annual LNG delivery schedule and payment mechanisms.

Too many cooks and that too with high rate of turnout of ministers, advisers, special

assistants and secretaries at the hands of Prime Minister Imran Khan had a key role. Practically, it was a continuous process of on-job learning soon followed by replacement.

As the situation stands now, the government has no more than 7-8 cargoes of LNG for December, January and February months against a requirement of 12-13 cargos a month and last year’s actual supply of 9-11 cargos. The domestic consumers and the industry are the direct sufferers of the shortage.

The government is right in claiming that domestic gas production is declining by 7-9 percent on an annual basis, thus a 25-35 percent drop in four winters since it came to power. But it is simply brushing under the carpet the fact that it allowed millions of new gas connections for residential consumers in these years knowing well it has no supplies to feed these additional consumers. These new connections may have created an additional demand of about 200 million cubic feet per day (MMCFD).

However, to be fair, no government, not at least over the past two decades, could be exonerated for the criminal policies they pushed in collaboration with gas companies to expand pipeline networks to secure

political mileage for politicians and guaranteed return on the cost of dead assets.

In fact, the natural gas has always been used by the successive governments for political patronage and by the opposition for political point scoring, as insecure leaders handled its pricing as a tool for political support.

Over the years, natural gas has been treated as a political commodity, and no attention has been paid to come with a pricing policy to direct and maximise its productive use. This despite the fact that independent studies have held that pricing should be made on the basis of the economic value of the commodity to the national output. This has led to inefficiency and wastage.

No wonder then, that gas has become a scarce commodity first in Punjab and then in other provinces one by one, pitting various consumer groups and industries against each other. This is despite the fact that all industries, by book, have nine-month supply contracts. The CNG sector has since been elbowed out, and residential consumers – although a political priority – seldom get the gas they require. This is despite the fact that significantly expensive LNG imports, although ring-fenced for pricing, get diverted to the domestic sector.

Amid criticism from parliamentarians over the acute gas crisis, the Ministry of Energy conceded before a meeting of the national assembly's standing committee on petroleum on 22 December 2021 that non-availability of even a single bid against tenders for import of eight LNG cargoes, stay orders secured by industries against rationing and pricing challenges were key reasons behind gas shortage.

The Petroleum Division came under severe criticism from members of the NA-panel over gas shortages across the country. Director General Gas reported that in view of the gas requirement, the government had invited tenders in October for eight LNG cargoes for delivery in December through January to meet peak winter demand but no bidder turned up. He said the country lacked gas storage capacity, which precludes advance imports in lean periods.

He said the gas pricing was also a major challenge because there was no law on determination of imported gas and the matter was being dealt with under an ad hoc mechanism in which LNG was treated as a petroleum product. The government's efforts to win over provinces for a weighted average cost of gas (WACOG) for both local and imported gas has made no headway so far but the proposed formula would only reinforce the inefficiencies and monopolies in the gas market for coming decades.

According to the petroleum division, 58 percent of SNGPL (Sui Northern Gas Pipelines Ltd) consumers belong to the residential sector and the Ogra (Oil and Gas Regulatory Authority) law would have to be amended for creation of a gas basket (WACOG) for imported LNG. Gas cuts had been applied to CNG, cement and captive power plants of the industrial sector and supply cuts were now also affecting the power sector.

Provision of sustained, secure and affordable supply of energy to the economy is the mandate of the Petroleum Division, Ministry of Energy. A winter gas load management plan (Dec-Jan) is annually proposed by Sui companies and implemented by them after approval of the Federal Government.

The challenges of managing gas supply to domestic consumers during winter include

enhanced demand vis-a-vis supply constraints and infrastructure limitations. Due to the wintertime heating requirements, the demand for gas increases. SSGCL (Sui Southern Gas Company Ltd) demand increases from 350 MMCFD to 500 MMCFD and SNGPL demand increases from 550 MMCFD to 1200 MMCFD.

A policy to allow diversion of RLNG on SNGPL network during winter months i.e., December to February every year starting from FY2018-19 onwards has been approved by the Federal Government to mitigate the demand challenges but the pricing gap is becoming a new challenge.



For reference, current average LNG prices work out at about PKR 2700-3000 per MMBTU thanks to major share of cheaper supplies from Qatar when compared to average domestic gas price of about PKR 650 per MMBTU including majority of consumers getting it at less than PKR 200 per MMBTU.

It is important to note that due to substantial difference in the tariff of indigenous gas and RLNG, the un-recovered tariff differential has accumulated to the tune of PKR 104 billion for SNGPL.

Based on a projection of national gas demand and supply position for November 2021 to March 2022 shows that demand between December 2021 and January 2022 is to increase from 4,243 MMCFD in November, 2021 to 4474 MMCFD (5 percent month on month) and 4782 MMCFD (7 percent month on month) respectively.

While the industrial demand remains constant throughout the year, there is substantial escalation in domestic demand during winter, leaving an actual deficit this winter of 717 MMCFD in December 2021 and 961 MMCFD in January 2022 for the domestic sector.

In order to address the energy demand and supply gaps, the Ministry of Energy provided an electricity incentive package for domestic consumers at PKR 12.96 KWh for incremental consumption from November 2021 to February 2022 so that pressure on gas consumption can be reduced. But this has hardly made any measurable dent in gas demand.

Further, an electricity incentive package has been put in place for export industry at the rate of 9 cents per KWh plus gas tariff for export industry (captive) has been raised from USD 6.5 per MMBTU to USD 9 to allow the industry to switch from gas to power grid and create a cushion for more gas supplies to domestic and fertiliser sector.

This has also not helped either and the industry secured stay orders and the government resorted to forced disconnections from gas supply to captive plants.

The government is now forced to rethink its energy subsidy priorities after coughing up over PKR 80 billion per annum in handouts to the export industry for over three years after it found little connection between subsidies and export growth and the textile industry reneging on its side of the pledge. The ministries of energy, finance and planning are convinced about rent-seeking attitudes and misuse of subsidised gas in the textile sector.



# Can Anything Come up to Mitigate “the Worst Humanitarian Crisis on Earth”?

*Humanitarian organisations have cried themselves hoarse warning of the looming disaster but no answers have been forthcoming*



By Haq Nawaz Nawaz Khan

As 2021 comes to a close, hopes are dwindling anything will transpire intime to significantly temper what the World Food Programme has described as “the worst humanitarian crisis on earth”.

A harsh winter of intense want and extreme hardship is tightening its grip on Afghanistan as the de facto rulers of the country struggle to find answers on their own and the world struggles to find a way to meaningfully contribute to the betterment of the citizenry without lending legitimacy or support to the obscurantist militia whose power grows out of the barrel of the gun.

People are facing food shortages and other basic needs, and there is no home-grown plan in the offing to cope with the situation. What Afghanistan will look like in the medium- and long-term is an important question, but the challenge right now is how to save the lives of millions of Afghan women and children. Everyone around the world is concerned about the prevailing crisis but none has any solution to it, except assistance.

The cash-starved Afghanistan is facing the worst humanitarian crisis since the Taliban took control of the country. The international humanitarian organizations have been asking the world for providing emergency assistance, but the response is not encouraging.

The self-proclaimed Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan or the Afghan Taliban seem to have no plan to avert this crisis. There is no money in the national kitty to pay salaries to the Afghan employees.

Afghanistan is an agricultural country, but its agriculture has been worst hit by the protracted conflict. The conflict is apparently over by the withdrawal of foreign troops in August 2021. However, the world left the war-ravaged country without any back up plan. Hundreds of thousands of professional and skilful Afghans fled the country fearing for the safety of their lives and their families.

Islamic Relief, a humanitarian organization, has issued an appeal to the world for donation to save

millions of Afghans.

“Millions of Afghans are on the verge of facing catastrophic famine, and their lives are at stake. Afghanistan is experiencing one of the worst droughts in 27 years, and as a result food, water, and supplies are extremely scarce,” said a statement issued by the Islamic Relief.

Afghanistan is beset by multiple challenges including the collapsing economy, rising poverty and harsh winter that may further push the lives of Afghans into crisis.

“Some 22 million people – more than half of the population – are facing acute food insecurity in the next three months,” the humanitarian agency warns, adding 97 percent of Afghans will be in the poverty within a year.

Afghanistan has been running through the foreign assistance for nearly 4 decades. The US led NATO countries have been claiming to have spent trillions of dollars in Afghanistan, but now the question arises as where that huge amount gone.

The economy collapsed when the US led alliance left Afghanistan. Analysts say Afghanistan main reliance is on the foreign aid, and 3/4th of the current and development expenditures have been meeting from the foreign assistance and grants.

The Taliban leadership is asking the world to help unfreeze 'Afghanistan's USD 9.5 billion' to cope with the humanitarian crisis. The world leaders have been pledging to provide some of the funds on humanitarian grounds, but that could not be enough to avert the crisis.

"The World Bank and Asian Development Bank have pledged to release some funds on the humanitarian grounds," one Afghan Taliban official, wishing not to be identified, told The Truth International (TTI).

He said our leadership has been holding negotiations with the senior officials of the US, EU, OIC, World Bank and Asian Development Bank to help Afghanistan's economic challenges. "We are optimistic of our meetings and the pledges made," the official, privy to the development, said.

However, leadership of the Taliban criticizes the International community, particularly the US, for punishing the whole Afghan nation for some pity issues. The world should help to clear the mess, it left behind.

However, the people of Afghanistan look towards the Taliban as it has been controlling the whole country. So far there is no comprehensive plan to take the country out of the crisis.

Critics say Taliban have no capability to revive economy, create jobs, and control inflation. There is no international trade as the Taliban government has not been recognized by the world.

Afghanistan foreign trade was at around USD 8 billion in the past, but it is almost at zero level. The US has been asking to improve the human rights situation, women should be give due share at the top government level and form an 'all-inclusive government', but the Taliban argue this is their internal matter, and that they know how to govern.

Leadership of the Taliban is asking the international community to immediately recognize its government – Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan, maintaining non-recognition

is one of the hurdles in the way of progress and development of Afghanistan.

"We have categorically told the world leaders that we have fulfilled all the conditions to be recognized as member of the United Nations. There are four basic conditions to be part of the International community that we meet," a senior Taliban official told TTI.



He said the preconditions for UN membership for a state are to have a geography, population, security and a government to rule. "We have fulfilled all these stated conditions, but the world is not responding to our repeated calls", he regretted.

"We are committed to what we have pledged in the 2020 Doha Peace agreement, but the US has not been implementing the agreement. Our senior leaders are on the blacklist, and it was pledged to remove their names in 3 months. But no progress has been made on this issue," the official stated.

The Taliban government is blaming the US and the world for the prevailing alarming situation in Afghanistan. The US and its allies are creating hurdles, and not helping to resolve our issues, they say. "We want good bilateral and economic relations the world, and we want to make Afghanistan self-reliant and that is the only way forward."

But the world is expecting more from the Taliban. Girls must be allowed to resume their studies, women must have representation at all levels and human rights must be respected.

The security situation is also not fully in control and the presence of Islamic State in Khorasan or ISK in Afghanistan is also seen as growing threat to the security of Afghanistan, the region, and the world.

The Taliban do not consider ISK as a major security challenge, saying their forces can handle it. The US and other countries offered to help fight the ISK jointly, which

the Taliban rejected. The Taliban claims it had eliminated the ISK in the past, and can defeat it again.

The ISK has carried out a number of major terrorist attacks in Afghanistan and also in the neighbouring Pakistan. Some experts view it a huge threat in the months ahead, which needs to be tackled jointly. The Taliban still sees ISK as the US and former Ashraf Ghani's government backed militant group, and will be defeated soon.

There are many challenges to the Taliban government on political, economic and security sides, but the common civilians are badly affected. There is no home-grown comprehensive strategy to revive the economy of Afghanistan, strengthen the political system and improve the security situation.

The ongoing crisis making it hard for the common Afghans to survive. The world needs to engage the Taliban for a safe and secure Afghanistan. A stable Afghanistan may help millions of the refugees to return to their country, but that will take years to come as Afghanistan has become one of the most complicated countries of the world.



# Merry Chitramas from Bumburet!

*The winter festival of the Kalash people of Pakistan's Chitral concludes two days ahead of Christmas*



By Zahiruddin

With two days still to go before Christmas, the holiday spirit is still picking up pace in the rest of the world. But the crisp mountain air in the secluded valley of Bumburet in Pakistan's Chitral region is heavy with religious and festive fervour. Today marks the culmination of the annual observance of Chitramas, marked by two weeks of festivities concluding on the Kalash New Year's day.

Known for their unique culture and way of life, Kalash are a primitive people living in the southern part of Pakistan's northernmost Chitral region. One of the indigenous tribes of this region, they dwell in three adjacent valleys called Bumburet, Birir, and Rumbur.

These simple and fun-loving people celebrate several festivals throughout the year. The best known of these are the spring festival called Chilim Jusht and the winter festival called Chitramas. Both these festivals attracting thousands of tourists from Pakistan and abroad every year.

Also called Chaumus, the winter festival of Chitramas prepares the residents of the rough and prolonged Hindukush winter during which heavy snowfall will keep the residents confined to their homes for almost four months.

Commencing in the second week of December, this festival lasts for fifteen days and concludes on 22nd of the month. The concluding day coincides the first day of Kalash calendar which has great religious significance to the Kalash people who believe the sun changes its course and gets news orientation that on this day.

The festival starts formally on 7th December with a ceremony of lighting the bonfire for which children of age below 10 years gather pine twigs and branches in a central place. The taller

the flames from the bonfire, the better the prospects of peace, prosperity, and amity in the forthcoming winter. Children and girls sing the songs specific to the occasion in which they seek the divine bounties from their gods and goddesses.

Sarazari is the second ceremony of the festival in which the children of less than two years are decked out in new clothes and costumes. This ceremony is widely attended by the villagers who shower gifts on the parents of the children.

Kotramu, another component of the festival, is of immense interest in which wheat dough figurines of various domesticated and wild animals are backed by women. The Kalash believe this ritual keeps evil souls from entering their homes during the festivities.

During the ceremony of Madaik, they pile up their preserved fruits including grapes, pears, apple and walnut in a central place of every small village which they have cleansed and washed to consume during the festival.

The festival enters the second and interesting phase when the ritual of autik starts. This involves a number of men and women in every village of the valleys volunteering to confine themselves inside a corral for the next five days. It is binding on every adult Kalash man and woman to go to seclusion at least once in their lifetime.

The secluded people completely insulate themselves from the other people during the period and they eat the meat of slaughtered goats, drink wine and pass the time in merry-making.

The rituals and customs of the final phase of the 15-day Chitramas festival are set in stone, not the slightest departure from which is allowed under any circumstances.



During these few days of the year, non-Kalash people are strictly prohibited from entering their homes or villages, although the highly hospitable Kalash gladly welcome outsiders throughout the year.

After the commencement of the ritual of autik, even a Kalash person, male or female, is not allowed to enter a village after the sunset as it is believed to pollute the stored food and cast bad omens for the people.

This, then, is the grand finale of Chitramas, taking place in the Bumburet valley where Kalash elders from the other two valleys of Rumbur and Birir have also arrived. festivities in those Peripeheral valleys concluded two days ago.

The day starts with a ceremony early in the morning in which a captive fox is set free by the panel of Kalash religious leaders called bitans drawn from all the three Kalash valleys. Based on the direction the fox takes after being released, the bitans will make prophecies for the coming year.

This year, the animal dashes towards a stream in the nearby jungle upon being released. The bitans interpret this as an omen of extended winter marked by heavy rain and snowfall followed by a pleasant summer yielding bumper produces of milk and honey. The prophecy pleases the people beyond measure as milk and honey are important components of the Kalash food.

The bitans also prophecy there will be no natural disasters throughout the year.

Groups of men and women who had gone to seclusion five days before today as part of the ritual of autik also came out on this occasion.

Kalash women and children attired in new traditional dresses have arrived and joined the grand assembly at the central dancing place or jastakhan situated at Broon village in the centre of the valley in small groups singing the special song of the occasion.

Announcement of the engagements newly nubile boys and girls are also made on the concluding day of the festival. Their marriages will be solemnised during the festival Chilim Jusht come spring.

Luke Rahmat Kalash, a young social worker from Bumburet, told The Truth International (TTI) as many twenty-seven couples have announced their engagements this year from Bumburet alone.

Like every year, people from other villages of Chitral have descended on Bumburet in throngs for the finale of this year's Chitramas finale, as have tourists from other parts of the country in smaller numbers – although there are hardly any foreigner to be seen this year except a few Chinese, presumably because of the Covid-19 restrictions.

One of the domestic tourists, Faiz Amin from Islamabad, said he has been coming to the valley for Chitramas for the last ten years regularly without any break. He was all praise for the Kalash, whom he found to be an exceedingly hospitable people, and said he returns each time accompanied by more friends and relatives.





# Why OIC is Under Fire in Pakistan

*The group's perceived inaction over Afghanistan's worsening human crisis has created some resentment*



By Mishaal Ashraf

Pakistanis – including some among the media corps – have for some time taken a fancy to the epithet “Oh, I See”, as applied to the OIC (Organization of Islamic Countries) by Dr Mahathir Mohamad according to anecdotal evidence. But public criticism of the grouping has been softball up until now in this country big on Muslim unity.

That seems to have changed since the 17th extraordinary session of the OIC of foreign ministers on the Afghan situation, held in Islamabad on 19 December 2021.

Prestigious media organisations have since run hard-hitting op-ed pieces lambasting OIC for what the writers deemed as its inaction over the looming Afghan disaster.

“OIC earned its spurs by letting all its verdicts – mostly on Palestine and Kashmir — die of old age – and thus awarded the dubious title of ‘The Graveyard of Muslim Miseries’”, said Lt. Gen. (R) Assad Durrani writing for The Friday Times (TFT).

A former Pakistan army three-star and spy chief, Gen. Durrani in his piece for the Lahore-based publication titled “What

Purpose Did The OIC Summit On Afghanistan Serve?” continued, “In Islamabad, [OIC] created a world record.

“The resolution on Afghanistan is creaking under the ings – welcoming; commending; recalling; recognising; reaffirming; expressing; proceeding; noting; underscoring; acknowledging; reaffirming; emphasizing; stressing – some of them repeated four to five times.

“The final tally is an impressive thirty four; except that the all important “acting” (to provide immediate relief to the suffering Afghans) is missing.

“There is still some light at the end of a three months long tunnel – and those who come out alive might see an entity that would be consuming most of the money donated for the famished Afghans, but may have to throw them a few crumbs.”

He was referring to the March deadline for the operationalisation of a humanitarian trust fund set up at the conference, to be managed by the Islamic Development Bank.

The general warns that the humanitarian disaster staring Pakistan in the face from across the western borders has the potential to wreak havoc in the region. He blames United States’ pressure for the inaction of OIC and Pakistan, and puts the onus for immediate action to alleviate the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan on Islamabad.

Says Durrani: “[I]f we are still rationalizing our inaction by the absence of banking channels and non-Pashtuns in the Kabul Regime, we have either lost the ability to withstand pressures, or forgotten the old maxim: where there is will, there is a way.”

He warns that if the crisis is allowed to linger and leads to turmoil in Afghanistan, “Pakistan will only have itself to blame for snatching defeat from the jaws of victory, we celebrated only a few months back”.

Gen. Durrani, who headed by Inter-Services Intelligence (DG ISI) and Military Intelligence (DG MI) by turns, has been a strong advocate of peace with India in his civilian life. He became somewhat of a



dissident after the publication of *The Spy Chronicles*, a book he co-authored with A S Dulat, a former head of India's RAW (Research and Analysis Wing).



Islamabad-based *The Nation* carried an opinion piece every bit as severe in its criticism of OIC, in which author Imran Malik, a former Pakistan army two-star, says the United States probably predetermined the outcome of this summit in terms of the degree of relief or the lack thereof to be allowed to the Afghans.

He laments that, as is usual with OIC

endeavours, this conference too was rather heavy on optics and rhetoric and light on real substance, and essentially uninspiring.

Malik rues that the Islamic brethren of the people of Afghanistan are apparently too beholden to the US to consider helping them forestall the inevitable catastrophe that looms overhead.

He notes that no financial pledges were made by any delegates except KSA which pledged a billion riyals (US\$265 million), and adds, "The Afghans will apparently have to live through a very harsh and cold winter with precious little to feed them or keep them warm".

Malik says, "The US now has Afghanistan by the scruff of its neck and is apparently the master of the game in the region. The Afghans might eventually get the desperately sought-after elixir of life, albeit one tiny sip at a time, as and when ordained by the US".

He then goads China, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey to move proactively to secure their collective interests in the Greater Middle East and South Asia-Central Asia regions, spare Afghanistan further despair, and restore strategic balance in the region.

He contends the OIC needs a paradigm shift and needs to become an assertive, egalitarian organisation immune to external pressures and internal

machinations, and maintains that until that happens, Muslims in Kashmir, Palestine, Myanmar, India and now in Afghanistan will continue to be victims of cold, self-serving (geo)politics.

Malik concludes: "Is Afghanistan too destined to end up as another long festering wound on the Muslim and world consciences as Kashmir, Palestine, the Rohingya and Indian Muslims are?"

Interestingly, the United States is probably the only nation in the world that has taken any practical steps to help alleviate the sufferings of the people of Afghanistan since the Islamabad conference.

A Reuters report said on 22 December Washington had formally exempted US and UN officials doing permitted business with the Taliban from US sanctions in an effort to maintain the flow of aid to Afghanistan.

On the same day, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken took to social media to hail the OIC meeting and praise Pakistan for hosting it.

"The OIC Extraordinary Session on Afghanistan is a prime example of our collective determination and action to help those most in-need", Secretary Blinken said in a tweet. "We thank Pakistan for hosting this vital meeting & inviting the global community to continue cooperating to support the Afghan people."





# The Vicious Cycle of Sanctions

*Is the global rivalry US-China rivalry is spiralling upwards on the wings of tit-for-tat sanctions?*

By Hamzah Rifaat Hussain

Regions such as Xinjiang have become political tools for furthering geopolitical designs and ensuring that hybrid warfare is conducted in a systematic manner. That is certainly the case with the latest round of tit for tat sanctions between China and the United States, resulting in hardening of the stances of both the Biden and Xi Jinping administrations.

Viewed impartially, it was the Biden administration which sought to parrot his predecessor's discredited mantras of China clamping down on the Muslim population within its own territory or committing egregious human rights violations in territories such as Hong Kong which has prevented the gains from the 2021 Virtual Summit earlier between the two sides to materialise. These sanctions constitute brazen power play at its best.

A closer examination of the late 2021 sanctions reveals an inconvenient truth. Washington DC championed coercion by banning imports from the region of Xinjiang over forced labour claims which Beijing has denounced as mere falsehoods.

Concomitantly, American activists have called for a total boycott of the Beijing Winter Olympics of 2022 which jeopardises China's ability to showcase its soft power and earn revenue which would add to its impressive economic profile during the late surges of the pandemic.

The veracity of the forced labour claims aside, the provocation has angered Beijing and does not bode well for the prevalence of Cold War binaries in the South China Sea or on the diplomatic front. Hegemonic designs aimed at the encirclement of China, though, are in full flow under President Biden.

On the other hand, the latest round of sanctions from China targeted the chairwoman and three members of the US panel who were barred from visiting mainland China, Hong Kong, and Macao, the latter two being part of China's peaceful reunification process.



The latest bill signed by the Biden administration criminalises trade with Xinjiang and subjects it to evidence that forced labour was not conducted by suppliers which is a grandiose example of callousness given the lack of verifiable claims to back such arguments and has resulted in this standoff continuing.

Noteworthy is the fact that these pernicious sanctions and legislation will have a trickle-down effect on unskilled labour in the territory, with their livelihoods dependent on export revenue.

Politicising Xinjiang has implications which go far beyond containing China as the Biden doctrine explicitly tries to promote. Xinjiang, however, is only the latest casualty of such politicking.

Earlier, the Biden administration designated a special coordinator for Tibetan issues, tasked with restarting dialogue between the Dalai Lama and China as well as promoting 'human rights' of Tibetans. This was met with a sharp rebuke from Beijing with Foreign Ministry spokesperson, Zhao Lijian firmly opposing any attempts to tinker with China's sovereignty.

An interesting aspect of the Biden strategy of encirclement alongside pernicious sanctions on China that it does not involve dialogue with the Communist Party of China despite Joe Biden expressing a will to

have honest communication with President Xi Jinping during the 2021 Virtual Summit meeting.

The latest round of sanctions is a continuation of the vindictive trade war unleashed by the Donald Trump administration which resulted in a tit for tat response from Beijing and harmed the world's international trade order as the initial stages of the Covid-19 pandemic ravaged through world economies and caused widespread disruption. This continuation will not result in any major breakthroughs.

That trend is, sadly, likely to continue as banning imports from Xinjiang, boycott calls for the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022, and sanctions against government officials associated with commissions dealing with the religious freedom is now part of American and Chinese foreign policies.

This is unfortunate for the international community given that amiable ties between the two sides could translate into peace in key region such as South Asia and the South China Sea. Strained ties will inevitably lead to greater tension and unease amongst countries such as Singapore and Malaysia who have long banked upon neutrality and maintaining close ties with both countries.

Dialogue based on better sense needs to prevail but so far that has remained elusive.

# The Travails of Liberal Democracies

*G7 has to remain on its toes in a world changing all around it by the minute*



By Umer Farooq

In an exemplar of how the Group of Seven (G7) feels the need to stay ever alert in the face emerging global challenges, the world's wealthiest liberal democracies issued separate and stark warnings to Russia and Iran in the middle of December 2021.

G7 foreign ministers meeting in Liverpool, England, said time was running out for Tehran to agree on a fresh deal to curb its nuclear ambition, and warned Russia about the consequences of invading Ukraine.

The political unity of liberal democracies, which took its present form during the Cold War against the Soviet Union, seems to be waning. Liberal democracies nowadays agree on few things and disagree on many. The mistrust between them runs high and the emphasis is increasingly shifting to each member to project itself as a distinct political entity instead of a united block that act in unity on the world stage.

The united political block of western liberal democracies may soon be a thing of the past.

France – still smarting from the hurt caused by the US move to take a lucrative submarine deal with Australia away from the French defense industry – sees Washington DC as an unreliable partner who ditches allies in Afghanistan and put profit above friendship.

The American President (not Joe Biden) dubbed America's western European allies as freeloaders who do not pay the bills of costly military ventures that the US undertakes to protect the interest of the whole of the western democratic world. Britain not long ago took a divorce from the European Union – the crown jewel of the western liberal democratic world.

The nuclear deal with Iran is evidence enough America and its western European allies do not see eye to eye anymore on many key issues of international security.

After Americans pulled out of the Nuclear Deal, European Foreign Ministers continued to push Washington to return to the table throughout the Trump presidency. The long and short of the story is that Liberal Democracies hardly act as a united block on the world stage anymore.

Now the situation with regards to Iranian nuclear deal is that Washington now has a new Democrat President whose administration is more willing to resume talks with Iran and enter into a new arrangement with the latter.

Meanwhile, the situation in Tehran has taken a turn for the worse, with every institution and every lever of power now controlled by conservative religious clergy and their political protégés. The hardliners in Tehran believe that Washington and its western allies want to put pressure on the Iranian clergy to deprive of its grip on the levers of power in Tehran.



They believe Iranian nuclear program is their first target and next will come the human rights and present political structures and centers of power which come under the spotlight next.

The talks between Tehran and Western powers were stalled following Washington's decision to withdraw from the deal in 2018. Britain, which holds the G7 rotating presidency, said resumed talks in Vienna were the Islamic Republic's "last chance to come to the negotiating table with a serious resolution."

"There is still time for Iran to come and agree to this deal," the British foreign secretary Elizabeth Truss told a press conference. Her comments are the first time a signatory to the original Iran deal has given an ultimatum for the talks.

Negotiations restarted on Thursday to try to revive the 2015 deal between Iran and world powers, which was derailed after Washington withdrew under former President Donald Trump in 2018.

US President Joe Biden has said he is ready to return to the agreement and Iranian officials maintain they are serious about committing to the talks. Western powers have accused Tehran of backsliding on progress made earlier this year and playing for time.

Iranian nuclear program, according to reported Western estimates, went into overdrive following Washington's withdrawal from the nuclear deal. Western estimates say that by September 2021 Iran had five tons of uranium enriched to 3.67 percent fissile purity, up from 200 kg agreed under the nuclear deal with the western powers.

It also had 85 kg enriched to 20 percent and another 10 kg enriched to 60 percent, far in excess of anything needed for civilian purposes. Iranian parliament has mandated a new generation of centrifuges that will extend the enrichment target to weapons grade purity of 90 percent or more.

These figures, quoted in western media as western intelligence estimates, show how close Iranians are to realising their nuclear ambitions.

The real response of G-7 liberal democracies to Iranian nuclear program will largely

depend on how Iran proceeds with its weapons program and whether any major development in the weapons program is detected by the western intelligence or not.

Under normal circumstances the western diplomats will spend the year 2022 shaping the outlines of nuclear negotiation with Iran. At present Iranians are busy buying time for their government, which is nothing serious.



The fractures in the political unity of western liberal democracies will not go undetected in Tehran and those capitals which have been providing political support to the Iranian clergy to survive. The past decades have seen close cooperation between Iranian government and both the government in Moscow and Beijing in military and strategic fields. There are reports in Western media about the possibility of Iran giving a naval base to China in many of its islands in the Gulf.

Based on this, western media as part of their loud and speculative thinking have pointed out that the first confrontation between China and western powers would be in the Gulf of Oman and not in the South China Sea, as is generally believed.

On land, the West may soon have to confront the mammoth of Russian land forces in Eastern Europe, where the western intelligence have indicated that Russia might be preparing for an attack on Ukraine by next year. G-7 also considered this issue and hurled a warning at Moscow.

US intelligence assesses that Russia could

be planning a multi-front offensive on Ukraine as early as next year, involving up to 175,000 troops. The Kremlin denies the allegations but has demanded legally binding security guarantees that NATO will not expand further east or place its weapons close to Russian territory.

G7 foreign ministers supported President Joe Biden's pledge to back Ukraine and deter Russian President Vladimir Putin

with a clear warning of severe economic sanctions.

"We've been clear that any incursion by Russia into Ukraine would have massive consequences for which there would be a severe cost," British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss told a news conference as the G7 talks wrapped up. When it comes to economic sanctions, Western officials said the G7 was "considering all options."

The second Cold War might be underway at present with Beijing and Washington competing with each other in the ideological and economic fields. But Iranian nuclear deal and the Ukraine situation might prove to be two flashpoints in the new east-west relations. If any of these situations turn into a hot war, we should be prepared for a long and protracted confrontation between East and the West.

For now, nobody knows if and when the war may turn hot, but one thing is certain: These confrontations might press western liberal democracies into a tighter union again.

# Iran Could be Close to Crossing the Nuclear Rubicon

*The logjam in Vienna may well mean neither party feels pushed to reach a deal*



By Shameer Niazi

Is something cooking in the region? The pot may not be on the stove but the stove has been lit up. The oft-turbulent Middle East once again appears to be headed for volatility.

Israel's incoming Air Chief, Major General Tomer Barhas recently issued threats directed at its long-time foe, Iran, which have raised many eyebrows. He claimed in an interview with Yediot Aharonot that his country could attack Iran's nuclear facilities tomorrow if needed.

The statements came just a day after the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, landed in Tel Aviv. Sullivan was there to take his Israeli counterpart into confidence on the snail-paced negotiations on the Iranian nuclear program taking place in Vienna.

Anxiety was already growing in Israel as it suspected that Iran would be granted sanctions relief without making any headway in rolling back its nuclear program.

As the US keeps pushing forward with its diplomatic efforts to curb the Iranian nuclear program, Israel is opposed to any such move. This was reflected in Israeli defence minister Benny Gantz's recent order to his troops to prepare a military option, saying that the military needs to "prepare for the Iranian challenge at the operational level."

The frequent high-level exchanges between Israel and the US within a span of weeks indicate growing discord over the approach to deal with the threat from Iran. Gantz, during his meeting at the Pentagon earlier this month, said the US is still aligned with Israel, but has broader priorities in the region.

Perhaps Israel's war hysteria is intended to keep the pressure on the negotiating parties to prevent any deal considered damaging to its interests from materialising. The nuclear deal reached by the Obama administration is still frowned upon by Israel, who labels it as insufficient in restraining Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons.

But whether Israel can mount a military offensive on Iran alone, without the crucial US military assistance, remains questionable. Most former Israeli military officials believe that Israel neither possesses the capacity nor the sophistication to target and completely wipe out the highly secretive underground nuclear facilities spread over distant districts inside Iran.

"It's very difficult — I would say even impossible — to launch a campaign that would take care of all these sites," said Relik Shafir, a retired Israeli Air Force general who was a pilot in a 1981 strike on an Iraqi nuclear facility.

Does it place a military adventure out of the equation? No. An attack on the Natanz nuclear site allegedly perpetrated by Israel in April, which damaged several centrifuges, confirms that the country does not always require Washington's explicit approval to move against Iran.

Nevertheless, both countries remain



engaged in a wide-ranging shadow war comprising cyberattacks, assassinations of senior figures, and sabotage operations against strategic organizations.

Meanwhile, in a sharp indication of a realignment in the region, Israel is cosying up with the United Arab Emirates. Prime Minister Naftali Bennet met with Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed in Abu Dhabi, making it the first official visit by an Israeli leader to the Gulf state.

The shared threat from Iran has brought the two nations together, though a difference of approaches to deal with the adversary persists. The Emiratis have kept the door to negotiations open, while Israel is adamant on a military solution.

A week prior to the Israeli PM's visit, UAE's National Security Advisor held talks directed at expanding the bilateral relationship with his Iranian counterpart before meeting Ebrahim Raisi, the Iranian President.

As Israel pushes ahead with its regional diplomacy intended largely to counter Iran and possibly formalise an alliance with Arab countries, the UAE and Saudi Arabia are in no mood for a confrontational path. This is evident from the Saudi commitment to peace talks with Iran facilitated by Iraq in Baghdad.

For Saudi Arabia to extend an olive branch to Iran indicates a major shift in policy. Perhaps the kingdom has finally realised that it can rely on Washington's military support for so long, since the latter attached preconditions, such as upholding of human rights to their supply – and that a conflict with Iran is unviable without a favourable US administration.

The kingdom has simultaneously shifted its economic priorities from being a primarily oil-revenue dependent economy to diversifying and opening up for tourism and recreation and in turn, gearing up for a post-oil era.

Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman (MBS) has introduced a sweeping set of reforms, unprecedented for an otherwise ultra-conservative society. Prominent amongst them being permitting women drivers, concerts, desegregation of genders, and outreach to Jews.

Another landmark reform is the order to mosques to decrease the volume of their loudspeakers to one-third of the capacity and to not broadcast full sermons. Similarly, the once-feared religious police have been stripped of powers to arrest offenders.

Whether the kingdom has actually liberalised, only time will tell. But one thing is clear: Saudi Crown Prince has set his eyes on leveraging the future – no matter the cost.



As Saudi Arabia lost its revered ally stature earned during the Trump era, its shady human rights record became the centre of attention in its relations with the US.

Although the reforms are intended to persuade the world the Kingdom is prepared to reverse course on its abysmal human rights record, it will continue to appear propaganda until space for dissent is established within the kingdom. Or else individuals like Jamal Khashoggi will continue to haunt the leadership.

The US retrenchment from the region has given rise to feelings of insecurity not only in Saudi Arabia but also in many of the kingdom's allies. Speaking of which, Bahrain, the fourth Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with Israel, in a first, received the foreign minister of Israel this year.

As Iran inches closer to becoming a nuclear power, rapprochement efforts have also picked pace – mostly driven by a mutual concern over Iran. A significant development in this regard was the maritime security exercise between the navies of the UAE, Bahrain, the US and Israel.

The region is currently rife with strategic realignments owing to fears that the Vienna talks will likely fail and the P5+1 negotiating with Iran would not be able to

prevent Iran from acquiring a nuclear weapon.

The US Special Envoy for Iran, Rob Malley, expressed similar apprehensions when he warned of an impending crisis saying that the time is running out for reinstating the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached between the P5+1 and Iran in 2015.

According to US national security advisor Jake Sullivan, the window for further talks in Vienna could close by the end of January or the beginning of February. The two sides have apparently reached an impasse where neither is prepared to show flexibility.

Malley also said, "Iran is nearing the capability to develop a nuclear weapon in the near future". If that is indeed the case and the Vienna process ends with no deal, expect more turbulence in the months ahead.

# Is Western-Style Democracy on the Decline?

*Unmistakeable erosion of long established democratic norms is in evidence in some Western democracies*

By Dr Khalid Bajwa

Western democracies have been in a continuous flux in recent times with long established norms eroding and eroding fast. For instance, one of the hallmarks of Western democracy was the involvement of a system where populism had no or limited space. That seems to be changing.

One of the reasons for such outright rejection of populism was that it rests more on the personal charisma of the leaders than emphasis on the institutions. Institutions are always threatened by popular leaders as the latter put themselves above the system.

Populist leaders by definition have scant respect for institutions as they consider them as restraints on their freedom to act on whims. As institutions are governed by laws, populist leaders in fact show disregard for the laws of the land by disregarding institutions.

Now for any state to sustain and function effectively, its citizenry must live by its laws. However, the behaviour of the populists results in duality of laws: One law for the commoners and the one for the elite. This results in a discriminatory set up that may be tolerated by the masses for a time, but will inevitably result in a deep sense of disapproval and resentment in a well informed and just society.

However, in a society that is defined by ill-educated and ill-informed populace it can descend into the total breakdown of the societal stability resulting in pseudo elite classes at every level circumventing the rule of law, resulting in total chaos.

Another consequence is seeping of corruption in society and becoming the norm. when that happens, societies refuse to punish corrupt leadership. Instead, the people galvanise around corrupt leaders for their wealth and it in turn increases their power.

In such a system, people are bought and used for the personal and nefarious designs. No one considers it bad; neither the sold one nor the seller nor indeed the general



population. Chaos, corruption, incompetence and cronyism rule the societal norms with all ugly off-shoots.

As society is deprived of productive, positive and creative environment, it seldom produces men and women of calibre. This vicious circle continues unless societies degenerate into total violent mobs ridden with deprivations, poverty, incompetence, mediocrity, and hopelessness.

This is a perfect recipe for extremism and violence that can be used for propagating the nefarious designs of the perpetrators. In the absence of creativity in society, these tools can be adopted by violent groups and states in equal measures.

Another characteristic of the populist leaders and movements is that their narratives are built around a certain fact surrounded by webs of blatant lies and misleading information. To peddle their own interests, they first sow a certain sentiment then rear it to the point of hatred against minorities or some made-up outside threats to the national interests.

Populist leaders keep on making one ghost enemy after another to sustain their popularity and support. They think they can get away with all kinds of lies and breaking rule of law. Instead of building institutions they build cults around their personalities. The history of various countries is full of such examples. It is always better to look closer at home to really understand the phenomena.

In societies like Britain, the United States and other established Western democracies there remains a possibility that the public will wake up to their ill-judgments and set the things straight by rejecting the populist leaders sooner or later. The recent elections in the US are a pointer to that direction, although America is still not out of woods.

Democracy in the US is reeling from its injuries and is under constant threat. The UK government is also under pressure for breaking the law at the highest level for arranging Christmas parties last year at 10 Downing Street. Some heads have already rolled but pressure is mounting on Prime Minister Boris Johnson to resign.

The situation has been further aggravated with the recent disclosure of alleged garden party at 10 Downing Street duly attended by Johnson.

The historic defeat in North Shropshire by-election, where Conservative Party lost the seat for the first time in 200 years further shows turbulent times ahead of the populist prime minister. The recent opinion polls also show that the Conservative Party is lagging behind Labour party.

Johnson may survive the political turmoil at hand but things are likely to become far muddier in times to come. In the light of previous paragraphs, it will be interesting to watch how things unfold in the future.



# How Good is Our Auto Industry Development and Export Policy?

*What we need is a consistent policy framework aimed at holistic development*



By Azeem Waqas

Auto Industry experts and the industry players have raised some serious reservations about the new Auto Industry Development and Export Policy (AIDEP 2021-26), terming it a just face saving for the government.

Automobile sector contributed around 30 percent in growth (3.56 percent) of large-scale manufacturing sector in the first four 4 months of FY22 because of the incentives given in the finance bill. However, the sector is still protected and barriers to entry of new players are in place, resulting in higher prices and lower quality.

Economic Advisory Group (EAG) of Prime Institute, an Islamabad based think tank, Ali Salman says that Auto assemblers raised prices due to higher energy and imported spare parts.

The government is unhappy with price hikes and the existence of “own money” in the market. Government is considering a regulatory body to determine prices of vehicles despite the presence of a regulator, EDB.

AIDEP includes promotion of small

cars, localization, incentivizing introduction of new products in tractors and motorcycles, consumer protection, promotion of new technologies i.e. EVs and Hybrids, targeting export markets and government has provided incentives to auto sector under AIDEP 2021-26.

The incentives were announced in budget 2021-22 and ancillary measures were approved by the cabinet on 21 December 2021.

Auto Industry is of the view that policy tax incentives are one part of the equation. Exchange rate, raw material prices, costs of industrial inputs, energy prices, etc., are the other part. For small cars, the tax incentives are a welcome step but to bring prices down a holistic approach to support industry is required.

SBP's hike in policy rate along with restrictive financing conditions contributed to a slowdown in car sales, which plunged from 18,971 in September to 17,413 in October to 15,351 in November.

Ali Salman says that the reason behind slower growth of auto sector has less to

do with policy rate hike and higher auto parts prices and more to do with the inefficient auto policy, which hinders the innovation by limiting the exposure to international competition and putting barriers for new entrants. “Distortions will only end when the market is open to new entrants”, he adds.

Auto industry sources says that major reason for flat growth in the industry are inconsistency in policies are disallowance of our own market to us. Growth essentially is a function of market availability and policy consistency.

Pakistan is one of the few countries of the world where we have a complete auto industry including cars, bikes, tractors, LCVs (Light Commercial Vehicles), HCVs (Heavy Commercial Vehicles) and auto parts sectors. And we are probably the only country in the world where used car imports are allowed in spite of having a fully-fledged auto industry.

At regular intervals, our policymakers have disallowed our own markets for

our manufacturers, which has resulted in lack of confidence on policy. “OEMs cannot confidently invest in capacity, localization and newer models just because they do not know when will some policy-maker feel that used cars are very important for the country”, one industry figure said.

Under the new auto policy, Meri Garri Scheme is being launched to provide affordable cars, vans and LCVs up to 1000 cc to the consumers. The government purports to zero-rate all taxes including additional customs duty, additional sales tax, withholding tax, and federal excise duty. Also, sales tax on locally manufactured cars has been reduced to 12.5 percent.

In the new product policy, customs duty has been reduced from 30 percent to 15 percent and sales tax down to 12.5 percent. These reduced tax rates are applicable to new models of all existing and new entrants for vehicles up to 1000 cc.

The government has announced to bring prices of locally manufactured cars down (above 1000 cc) for which it has reduced FED by 2.5 percent on each category of cars, SUVs, and LCVs. Effective FED rates have thus been lowered for 1001-2000 cc, from 5 percent to 2.5 percent; for up to 1000 cc, from 2.5 percent to 0 percent; and for above 2000 cc, from 7.5 percent to 5 percent.

Auto Industry players says that despite of the fact that 1000 cc to 851 cc cars have been excluded from benefit, still for smaller cars the benefit is there.

Under the Auto Policy 10 percent export targets have been fixed as percent of import for OEMs till 2026. Auto industry is of the view that it is too early to comment on export target fixed by the government.

Motorcycle and tractor sectors have been exporting without the policy targets. Which leads us to believe that export is not a function of policy targets without supporting the industry holistically. Support by way of tariff, stable exchange rate, cheaper industrial inputs and assistance for market development are some of the support factors that will help industry to look for export avenues.

Own money has become one of the big

problems for customers. Government has decided to tackle this menace by taxes amounting to PKR 50,000 PKR 100,000 and PKR 200,000 for different CCs of vehicles on registration, where booking is made by Person A and registration is made in name of Person B. Compulsory payment KIBOR+3 percent interest by manufacturers on delivery beyond 60 days on initial deposited amount

Ensuring safety has been proposed under the new auto policy. The importer-cum-assembler or OEM shall comply with shortlisted WP-29 regulation as determined by EDB, whereas EDB shall ensure the compliance. No vehicle will be allowed to be manufactured or imported after 30 June 2022 that is not compliant with the requisite safety standards.



In new auto policy, incentives on electric vehicles been proposed. Customs Duty (CD) on specific parts for electric vehicles will be at 1 percent. Reduction of sales tax on locally manufactured EVs having battery pack below 50 KWH to 1 percent from 17 percent. Import of EV CBUs has been allowed for one year with 10 percent customs duty instead of 25 percent.

Incentives for EV specific parts on motorcycles (CD 1 percent), 3 wheelers and heavy commercial vehicles.

Specific parts for hybrid electric vehicle and plug-in hybrid electric vehicle will be subject to attract 4 percent and 3 percent customs duty respectively. Reduction of

sales tax (8.5 percent). Reduction in Regulatory Duty on CBU Import of Hybrids (15 percent for above 1800 cc, 0 percent for 1800 cc and below. Continuity of ADP 2016-21 for CKD Manufacturing till 2026 or 3 to 5 years from issuance of manufacturing certificate on case to case basis)

The auto policy envisions all OEMs implementing online booking systems for cars, LCVs and HCVs to ensure traceability. Upfront payment has been restricted to 20 percent for cars, LCVs, SUVs i.e. OEMs will entertain booking request on payment of 20 percent of total invoice amount, at the time of booking.

Approval for duty free import of plant and machinery for setting up plants for EV

manufacturing is also given under the Auto Policy.

The independent Economic Advisory Group (EAG) says that it observed that prevalent policies do not present a path for transformation for the sector to either meet the needs of the domestic consumer or become globally competitive.

Specifically, the policy regime falls short at both providing a mechanism to bring down prices on sustainable basis and ensuring development of Pakistan's industrial capabilities necessary for competing in international markets.



# 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 1)

**E**schatology, the doctrine of last things, was originally a western term, referring to Jewish, Christian and Muslim beliefs about the end of history, resurrection of the dead, the Last Judgment, the messianic era, and the matters relating to the vindication of God's justice.

Apocalypse (Greek for "revelation of divine mysteries") means cosmic catastrophe, the end of the world (eschatological events), while cataclysm is a large scale disaster (like WWI) but does not mean the end of the world.

One third of the Holy Quran relates to matters of eschatology, focusing mainly on warnings and encouragement concerning God's final judgment of man and the bifurcation of human race suffering perdition (to hell) and those enjoying the blessings of Heaven.

Quran and Hadith (saying of the Prophet of Islam, peace be upon him (PBUH)) do not offer fully descriptive scenarios of end times. Hence, opinions in the matter are quite variegated – as is the case with Christian and Jewish eschatology.

On one extreme are scholars who have total belief in the literal description of the end times and on the other extreme are rejectionists who believe such descriptive Ahadith (sayings) lead to inaction and expectation of divine intervention for alleviation from the decadent and downtrodden state of the Muslims.

Others only believe in Jesus, Gog and Magog and a final war followed by peace and stability and some even doubt the authenticity of most of the Ahadith of end times while still others consider that many prophecies have already been fulfilled.

It is important to note that the Prophet of Islam (peace be upon him) prophesied events immediately after his death till the last hour. Let us first review different viewpoints about Gog and Magog, Masih al-Dajjal (anti-Christ), Mahdi, and the final reign of peace and prosperity. Most of the viewpoints have been derived from interpretation of Ahadith.

## Gog and Magog

Gog and Magog have been mentioned in Quran.

One view is that they would be from a race, descendants of third son of Noah, Japheth (Yafes), who inhabited the regions north of Caucuses, from Mongolia, Central Asia and up to northern Russia. Famed as ruthless warriors who have been raiding and looting fertile Syria and northern Iran since the times of Assyrian kingdoms, they will again ransack Middle East during end times.

Another view is that they are a beastly race, inhabitants of hidden caves in Nordic region and they would be released by the Will of God when Jesus is ruling the Middle East.



A third view, prevalent among modern Muslim eschatologists, is that Gog and Magog refers to Khazar tribes which migrated from north Caucuses into eastern and northern Europe and whose descendants have settled in Christian Europe and also east European Jews who migrated to the Palestine regions around lake Tiberias. This white race has dominated the world in modern times and no other nation until end times can defeat them.

## Al Masih al-Dajjal

The anti-Christ will be a human with super natural powers, who would be the master controller of physical laws on earth and rule the material world and would exercise absolute control over humanity.

Another view considers him to be a General of Satan (a superhuman) who was alive even during the life of Prophet of Islam. He is chained in captivity hidden from the physical world and would be released just before the arrival of Jesus Christ from the skies. No human has the power to kill him except by the supernatural powers of Jesus.

## Al Mahdi

The rightly guided one and savior of humanity, the Mahdi would be the leader of Muslims during the end times, who will defeat all other nations through military encounters, occupy Jerusalem and become a just Caliph of a super state of Middle Eastern nations.

He will lead God's people in defeating the roman allied armies (in the Armageddon), and his status will be so exalted that even Jesus Christ will accept him as a prayer leader. The Mahdi will rule for seven or nine years. After his death, Jesus Christ will be the final ruler for forty years.

Another viewpoint does not acknowledge his rule, but rather holds the view that after defeating the anti-Christ, Jesus will directly rule the world with peace and prosperity for seven years.

Shia eschatology propounds that the 12th Shia Imam Muhammad al-Mahdi, who went into occultation in 9th century, will return as Al-Mahdi of the end times.

Regarding the time when the Hour will be struck, the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) considered it imminent and wanted the believers to remain prepared for it all the time.

Quran says; “Men ask you about the hour. Say: Knowledge of it is with God. What will make you understand? Perhaps the hour is near,” (Surah 33, verse 63). “They see the (day) far off, but we (God) see it quit near,” (Surah 70, verse 6-7). “Closer and closer to people is their reckoning, while they in neglect turn away,” (Surah 21, verse 1). According to the Prophet (PBUH), when a person dies his reckoning has started.

Unlike Quran, it is the Hadith that furnishes a vast variety of detail on the warnings of the hour that signify its imminence. Islamic eschatological experts were influenced by Judeo-Christian apocalyptic literature.

In addition, western scholars have read the apocalyptic Ahadith as a reflection of the cultural, social, and political turmoil that marked Muslim history during its first century-and-a-half. Muslim theologians and historians would refer to these times of turmoil as fitna (upheaval, anarchy), and fitun its plural became the title of chapters of Hadith relating to turmoil until the end times.

Historical and moral “signs”, i.e. those that have occurred and/or are still to come, are listed under the heading of “minor signs”, and those about the End of history and messianic traditions are collected in the chapter entitled “major signs”. Some of the signs are listed below:

## Minor signs of the Hour

1. The Prophet’s mission (since Mohammad (PBUH) is the last Prophet sent to mankind); the death of the Prophet;
2. The conquest of Jerusalem;
3. Superabundance of wealth that leaves no one in need of sadaqa (charity);
4. The appearance of fitun (turmoil, anarchy); when sectarians and dissenters belie the true message of Islam; when Muslims appropriate the traditions of others (Persians and Byzantines, Jews and Christians); when religion is affected by (heretical) innovations;
5. The appearance of false prophets (30 Dajjals);
6. Muslims will struggle against people having flat faces like shields with shoes of fur;
7. The loss of trustworthiness, loyalty and integrity;
8. The suppression of knowledge and dominance of ignorance;
9. The spread of usury;
10. The condonement of musical instruments and widespread consumption of wine; the prevalence of illicit sexual relations;

11. A (perceptible) acceleration of time (when a year feels like a month, a month like a week, a week like a day, a day like an hour, an hour like the small amount of time it takes for a palm leaf to burn to ashes);
12. The decoration of Masjids as a matter of pride and competition;
13. The Greening of Arabia; when the land of the Arabs return to being a land of rivers and fields;
14. Departure of righteous;
15. The rise to prominence of the despicable (to where the liar is believed, the traitor trusted, and the fool’s advice heeded).
16. The emergence of women who are rude even when they are clothed;
17. Neglect by Muslims of the rules of Islam;
18. Prevalence of false testimony (and suppression of true testimony);
19. Abundance of earthquakes;
20. Arabs in Middle East will face anarchy and lawlessness;
21. Abundance of wealth will be spent extravagantly;
22. Massacre of Hajj pilgrims and hajj will be performed without Ameer;
23. Civil war between heirs after the death of a king;
24. River Euphrates will expose a mountain of gold, and much killings and fighting will occur for its acquisition;
25. Desert Arabs will compete in building sky rising buildings;

## Ten major signs of the Hour

1. The Smoke;
2. Appearance of Al- Masih ad-Dajjal (anti-Christ);
3. Eisa bin Maryam’s (Jesus Christ) coming on Earth from the skies;
4. Sinking of earth in the east; sinking of the earth in the west;
5. Sinking of the earth in the Arabian peninsula;
6. Release of Gog and Magog;
7. Rising of the Beast (Da’abba-tul-arz) from the earth;
8. Sun will rise from the West
9. A big Fire will spread from Eden, which will surround and drive people towards ‘Mehshur’ (Reckoning);
10. The Wind which will throw people into the river.

Description of anti-Christ, Mahdi, and the sequence of events during end times will be dealt with in the next part.



# Punjab's VAW Epidemic

*Could more women in the criminal justice system help turn the tide?*

## TTI Report

An official report has made a provocative recommendation with a view to ending impunity for the perpetrators of violence against women:

Based on official data sourced from across the federal, provincial, and district governments, the report presents a detailed survey of gender parity in Punjab across six thematic areas of justice, demographics, education, governance, health, economic participation and opportunities, and special initiatives.

The report paints a grim picture of the situation, saying women in Punjab faced astonishingly high instances of sexual assault, harassment, rape, kidnapping, and domestic violence in 2019 and 2020.

Some 197 women were killed in the name of honor in 2019, while 237 women were killed in 2020, depicting an annual increase of 20 percent. In 2019, 12,646 women were reportedly kidnapped in Punjab, as opposed to 12,433 in 2020, depicting a 1.7% fall in reported cases of kidnapping.

From 2018 to 2019, reported cases of VAW increased from 8712 to 8767, depicting an increase of 0.63 percent in reported cases. This number increased to 8797 in 2020, depicting an annual increase of 0.34 percent in reported cases. Rape was the most commonly reported act of violence against women.

Conversely, burning and wani were reported less often. In 2019, a total of 1,158 cases of domestic violence were reported in Punjab (including murder, attempted murder and domestic beating), while a lower number of 1,118 cases were reported in 2020.

In 2019, a total of 3881 cases of rape were reported in Punjab. Comparatively, a lower number of 3773 cases were reported in 2020, depicting a decrease of 2.8 percent. 37 and 28 cases of acid burning were reported in 2019 and 2020 respectively, depicting a fall of 24 percent in reported cases of acid burning in Punjab.

In 2019, 5565 cases that concerned VAW were decided by Courts in Punjab; of these, only 240 cases (4.3%) resulted in convictions and 5325 cases (95.7%) resulted in acquittals. Of the 4,105 cases decided in 2020, 223 cases (5.4%) resulted in convictions, while 3882 cases (94.6%) resulted in acquittals.

Of the total prison population of 46,233 inmates in 2019, 45,499 (98%) are men and 734 (2%) women, with a GPI of 0.016. 102 of 734 (14%) women are accompanied by their children. A total of 150 children (73 boys and 77 girls) reside with their mothers in 22 prisons across the province.

Data received for 2019 reports 714 police stations while data for 2020 reveals 720 police stations in Punjab. By the end of 2020, 32 percent of all police stations in Punjab had helpdesks for women.



Data for Prosecutors in 2020 represents a slightly better GPI than that in 2019; of 804 prosecutors in 2020, 668 (83%) were men and 136 (17%) women, with a marginally better GPI of 0.20. 12 people (9 men, 3 women) were provided legal aid in 2019. This number dropped to 4 (3 men, 1 woman) in 2020.

By 2020, there were 158 social services institutions across the province, an improvement on 138 Social Services Institutions in 2017. While 2018 and 2019 showed similar numbers of women residing in social services institutions (11,668 and 11,504 respectively), there was a sharp drop of 13 percent to 9,987 women in 2020. There was also a drastic fall (68.5 percent) in women provided redress at the SBBHRC in Punjab; from 5,553 women in 2019 to only 1,747 women in 2020.

This could be due to partial operations of the SBB Human Rights Center due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

In 2020, domestic violence (907 complaints) was reported most frequently at the VAWC in Multan. Least number of complaints were received for fraud/robbery (1 complaint), economic violence (2 complaints) and property disputes (5 complaints).

The report notes how our criminal justice system struggles to hold the perpetrators of these crimes to account, saying, "[T]rends depict overwhelming impunity for perpetrators due to rampant corruption, insufficient and incorrect evidence collection, biases and discrimination against women, and socio-cultural norms that limit reporting of VAW".

It then recommends recruitment of more women in the criminal justice system through appointment of more women in leadership positions in the Judiciary, prosecution and police; induction and promotion of more female judges in the district judiciary and Lahore High Court; and Recruitment and promotion of more female police officers and officials, especially to facilitate women at help desks.

It also recommends creation of a senior position in Punjab Police for a female police officer in-charge of oversight of GBV cases.

# Climate Emergency at the Rooftop of Pakistan

*220 million Pakistanis are threatened with devastating consequences of global warming playing out in the mountains up north*



By Momina Ashraf

While human-induced warming is a global phenomenon, average temperatures in Pakistan are rising at doubled the rate of the rest of the world. This startling claim came from Special Assistant to the Prime Minister (SAPM) on Climate Change Malik Amin Aslam at an Islamabad conclave commemorating the International Mountain Day.

This is why incidents of Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF) have increased five times during the past three years, said the SAPM in his keynote address at a seminar in connection with the International Mountain Day. The theme of this year's IMD was Sustainable Mountain Tourism.

Mountains are home to 15 percent of the world's population and host about half of the world's biodiversity hotspots. They provide freshwater for everyday life to half of humanity. Their conservation is a key factor for sustainable development and is part of Goal 15 of the SDGs.

Unfortunately, mountains are under threat from climate change and overexploitation. As the global climate continues to warm, mountain people — some of the world's poorest — face even greater struggles to survive. The rising temperatures also mean that mountain glaciers are melting at unprecedented rates, affecting freshwater supplies downstream for millions of people.

Mountain tourism constitutes around 15 to 20 percent of global tourism according to UN statistics. Tourism, however, has been one of the sectors hardest hit by the Covid-19 pandemic, that has affected economies, livelihoods, public services, and opportunities on all continents.

In the mountains, the restrictions of the pandemic have further compounded the vulnerabilities of the sequestered communities.

Climate change has also has a disproportionate impact on the life, livelihoods, and tourism in mountains

as human activities causing deforestation and environmental degradation wreak havoc on the delicate mountain ecosystems.

The phenomenon called GLOF is a product of environmental degradation. Like a hurricane or earthquake, a GLOF event can destroy up to 70 percent of the infrastructure necessary for disaster response, making rescue and rehabilitation more challenging by that much.

The UNDP-Pakistan has done a scientific analysis of lakes and glaciers to select particular districts in Gilgit-Baltistan and Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (K-P) for installing early warning systems, weather monitoring technologies and sustainable agriculture practices under the GLOF project.

The second phase of Pakistan's Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF-II) Project is returning proper and timely data on melting glaciers, helping out in



informed decisions for disaster mitigation and adaptation.

Still, the subnational governments in Pakistan must play a proactive role in taking care of our mountains. The foremost task on our hands is to stop the timber mafia from decimating our forests, and holding in check the appetite for housing development. Equally, we must pay due attention to the challenges of conservation and afforestation.

Sustainable tourism in mountains can contribute to creating additional and alternative livelihood options and promoting poverty alleviation, social inclusion, as well as landscape and biodiversity conservation. It is a way to preserve the natural, cultural and spiritual heritage, to promote local crafts and high value products, and celebrate many traditional practices such as local festivals.

Many mountain communities particularly in northern Pakistan are dependent for their daily bread on tourism. It is therefore neces-

sary for the government to find ways and means to put mountain tourism back on track while minimising its impact on the local mountain climate.

Experts have urged for the adoption of non-traditional business models for sustainable mountain tourism. The idea should be to minimise the footprint of human activity as much as possible to allow natural processes of healing to take hold.

In particular, Pakistan needs to embrace community-based tourism approaches and mechanisms. The need of the hour is to develop sustainable mountain tourism based on conservation of nature.

The most forbidding aspect of the problem is that mountain glaciers in northern Pakistan feed Pakistan's river system, contributing the lions share to the country's freshwater supply.

The accelerated melting of these glaciers in the absence of adequate snowfall to replenish the snow stock can only lead to gradual

drying up of our rivers, a prospect that threatens to turn Pakistan into a post-apocalyptic hellscape.

Like every other country, Pakistan needs resources to cope with climate change as well as to reverse it on a large scale is by reducing air pollution, substituting fossil fuels with green fuels, and recycling of reusable materials. In particular, Pakistan needs to work out sufficient financial solutions for supporting nature-based solutions and GLOF like projects.

During the COP-26 international climate change summit, Pakistan apprised the world community that loss and damage mechanism is important for countries like Pakistan due to the huge economic burden caused for instance by GLOF events.

The government would do well to follow through on its COP-26 resolutions with concrete action. Pakistan is at the frontline of climate change and the world cannot be aloof to our predicament.



# Cricket Under the Grim Shadow of Covid-19

*Scuttled Windies tour aside, the pandemic now looms over PSL 7 and the Aussies' Pakistan tour*



By Khurram Kaleem

As it has effected every other aspect of life, the Covid-19 global pandemic has exacted a heavy toll on cricket worldwide. Tours have been abandoned and schedules thrown in disarray for every cricketing destination, and Pakistan has been no exception.

In December, Pakistani spectators had the misfortune to see the ODI leg of the West Indies tour postponed to June 2022 after multiple cases of Covid-19 were confirmed in the West Indies team and support staff.

The setback is particularly disastrous as it comes just ahead of 2022 Pakistan Super League or PSL 7, scheduled to begin on 27 January 2022, with the final to take place on 27 February.

Equally, the pandemic looms over the Pakistan tour of Australia, scheduled to begin in March 2022. The long awaited tour will comprise three test matches, three ODIs and a T20I.

During the West Indies series, Australian security delegation was present in Pakistan to assess the security situation and the facilities provided to the West Indian team.

The T20i series between Pakistan and West Indies was not as easy as expected before the start when six of the senior players refused to visit Pakistan and later Captain Kieron Pollard pulled himself out of the series due to an injury.

The young WI captain Nicholas Pooran led his team so well that Pakistan had to strive hard to secure the series. West Indies almost won the last two matches. However, the experience of Pakistani team stopped them from achieving this target.

For Pakistan, Muhammad Rizwan and Muhammad Wasim were the pick of the series. Rizwan continued his form by scoring 203 runs in his three appearances with a handsome average of 67.66 per innings. His role was pivotal in almost all three victories against West Indies.

Not only did he improve his T20 ranking by reaching at the third spot, he also achieved a milestone by scoring 2000 runs in a calendar year. He is the first player to achieve this apparently impossible milestone.

Pakistan's Captain Babar Azam looked

off colour in first two matches of the series but managed to regain his form in the final game. He scored 86 runs in his three appearances with an average of 28.66. Out of these 86 runs he scored 79 in his last innings. Before the start of the series he was positioned first in the T20I rankings but after this inconsistent performance he is now ranked at 2nd position after David Malan of England.

Haider Ali, who managed to get another chance in Pakistan side after many failures in the past few series, performed exceptionally well. He scored 99 runs in his two appearances in the series. His innings of 66 runs earned a victory for Pakistan. This performance would be a morale booster for this young star, whom with Pakistani fans have great expectations.

Iftikhar Ahmed, Fakhar Zaman and Asif Ali were not able to impress the West Indian bowlers by their stroke play.

Muhammad Wasim was impressive throughout the series with his yorkers. He managed to get 8 wickets in three matches and played an important role in earning a series victory for the country.



At the same time, his rather expensive economy rate remained the matter of concern for the team management. He was given all three matches to boost his confidence and he delivered in all these matches. But for securing a permanent place in the national side he will have to improve his economy rate.

Shaheen Shah Afridi was comparatively economical with 7.62 per over. He played two matches and grabbed four wickets which is, undoubtedly, a phenomenal performance.

Shadab Khan, after a long time, managed to create an impact in the series. Though he got 3 wickets in his all three appearances but his economy rate of 6.25 was quite good. Besides, he hit a blistering 28-runs knock off 8 balls in one of the matches which included three mighty sixes.

The young West Indies side fought bravely in the series. Inexperienced opener Bandon King was the pick of the Caribbean batting line-up. He scored 111 runs with an average of 37 runs. He impressed the spectators by

his hitting skill and great fighting spirit. It also counts that King managed to score these runs with the handsome strike rate of 168.18.

Captain Nicholas Pooran was good with the overall score of 108 runs in the series. Young all-rounders Shamarh Brooks and Romario Shepherd also showed great performance with the bat.

Odean Smith and Romario Shepherd were successful bowlers from West Indies but their bowling efforts could not stop Pakistani batters from scoring impressive totals in all three matches. Both the bowlers managed to grab 4 wickets each in three matches of the series.

Although Pakistan has managed to win all three matches of the series, it nevertheless exposed many grey areas where Pakistan will have to work hard to win against comparatively stronger sides in the future.

Haris Rauf, Muhammad Waseem, and Muhammad Nawaz remained a little expensive against the young batting line-up

of West Indies. Babar Azam was, once again, vulnerable against the left arm orthodox spin bowling of Akeal Hosein and Moti Kanhai.

In the recent series against South Africa left arm leg spinner Maharaj had also made life difficult for Pakistani Captain. Now teams have done their homework and they normally don't allow Babar Azam to play his favourite cover drives freely. This was evident throughout the T20 World Cup and in the matches played afterwards. This clearly means Babar will have to expand his repertoire to keep scoring runs.

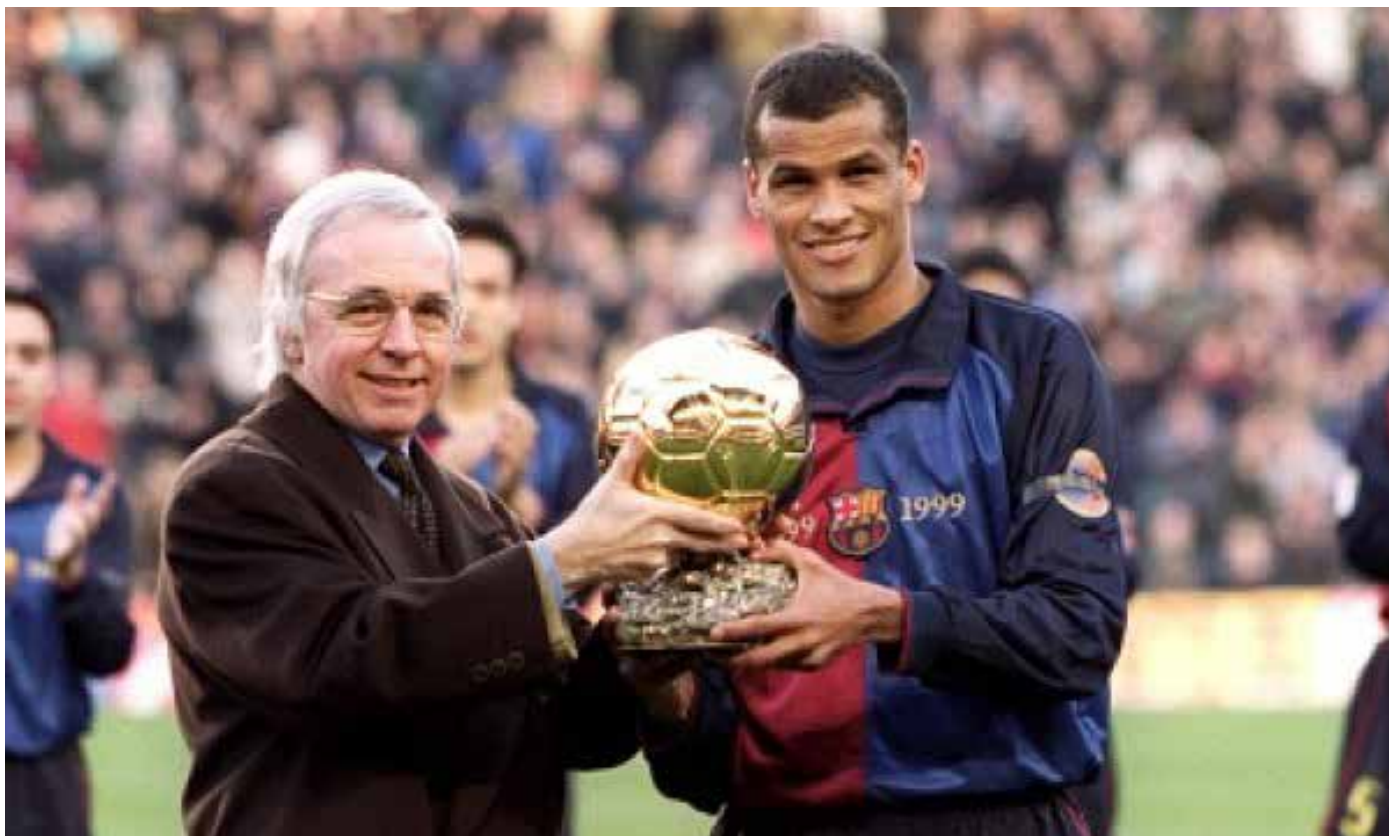
On the other hand, it is interesting to see how the proliferation of T20 leagues has started to take its toll on international cricket. Now players focus more on lucrative leagues instead of representing national sides.

This trend was clearly on display when some senior West Indian players pulled out of the series against Pakistan and preferred to conserve their energies for the upcoming leagues.



# There is No Template for Greatness

*A look at the life and career of Barcelona's Brazilian superstar Rivaldo*



By Ali Abdullah

He had no premonitions of greatness while growing up in a dirt-poor neighbourhood of Paulista municipality of Brazil's Pernambuco state, no protein-rich diet regime to ensure growth of his bone and sinew, no tailor-made training sessions in his teen years, no grooming to handle global limelight.

Yet, the gangly son of Romildo Ferreira achieved global stardom against all odds in the world's most competitive team sports to become a household name around the globe on the power of his sheer talent and grit.

Today, Rivaldo is exhibit A for the maxim there is no template for greatness. There are as many paths to greatness as many great people there are.

Once labelled by The Guardian a "bandy-legged genius" for being bowlegged, Rivaldo is regarded as one of the greatest players of all time almost seven years after his retirement from professional football.

In a poignant tribute published in late December 2021, BBC Sport's Gary Meenaghan traces Rivaldo's journey from his childhood poverty to greatness later in life. The story is heart-breaking and inspiring by turns.

Consider, for instance, a lanky, visibly malnourished young man telling a television reporter after his debut for local side Santa Cruz: "My dream is already being realised; to play for Santa Cruz. I hope to achieve more and become an idol for the club's fans."

Rivaldo spent five years with Spanish club Barcelona, where he formed a successful partnership with Patrick Kluivert. He won the club the 1998 and 1999 Spanish La Liga championship and the 1998 Copa del Rey.

His three goals against Valencia in June 2001, which qualified Barcelona for the Champions League, is often ranked the greatest hat-trick ever. The last of these came off a last minute 20-yard bicycle kick. He is Barcelona's ninth highest goalscorer with 130 goals.

At the international level, Rivaldo played 74 matches and scored 35 goals for Brazil between 1993 and 2003, becoming the country's seventh highest goalscorer. He helped Brazil reach the final of the 1998 FIFA World Cup, and win the 1999 Copa América where he was named player of the tournament.

Rivaldo starred in an attacking trio with Ronaldo and Ronaldinho in the 2002 FIFA World Cup winning team. Scoring in five of Brazil's seven games at the tournament (including a feint that set up Ronaldo for the second goal in the final), Rivaldo was named in the FIFA World Cup All-Star Team in 2002 having also previously been selected in 1998.

Considered one of the most skillful and creative players of his generation, Rivaldo won fame for his vast repertoire including bending free kicks, bicycle kicks, feints, powerful ball striking from distance, and his ability to both score and set up goals.

In 1999, he won the Ballon d'Or and was



named FIFA World Player of the Year. In 2004, he was named by Pelé in the FIFA 100 list of the world's greatest living players. He is an inductee to the Brazilian Football Museum Hall of Fame.

But none of this was presented to Rivaldo on a silver platter. He had to fight for every inch of the way. The dark shadow of hardship hung over his childhood as his father Romildo, who worked in the prefecture in Recife, struggled to provide for Rivaldo and his two older brothers and two younger sisters.

Meenaghan says as a young boy, Rivaldo would help his parents work at weekends by weeding gardens and roaming the city's most popular beaches, selling chewing gum and ice lollies. On match days, he would set up outside Estádio do Arruda, home of his beloved Santa Cruz.

Other sources say Rivaldo's daily routine as a teenager involved selling souvenirs to tourists in the morning and playing football with his friends in the evening.

His Ballon d'Or citation says Rivaldo does not like to talk about those times very much – not because he is ashamed of his origin but because he does not want to be reminded of those dreadfully hard times. “Anyone who has not experienced life as far down as I have will never be able to understand it”, he explains.

Rivaldo lost his real teeth to malnutrition and had them replaced later with a false set. He received his first boots from his father at 13.

The worst moment in Rivaldo's life was when he lost his father to a car road accident. The 16-year-old was devastated by this cruel blow from fate, and wanted to give up football because his father had been his only source of encouragement, the only person who had faith in him.

“My father never left my side”, he has been quoted as saying. “On the street, on the beach, he was always with me. He helped me on the road to becoming a professional”.

That was when his mother rose to rescue him from the clutches of dejection. “You can't give up now”, told him. “You must make your father's dream come true”. Her words put Rivaldo back on his path to stardom.

Three weeks later, he trialled for Santa Cruz and was accepted. Still, his task for uphill. Santa Cruz's training grounds were 15km from Rivaldo's home, and out of money, he would make the 30km round trip on foot each day.

“He would arrive tired and leave tired - and his bow-leggedness became more pronounced. Despite his commitment, praise was hard to come by”, says the BBC piece.

Nor was this the last of the adversities Rivaldo Vítor Borba Ferreira would face on his way to stardom. But none of them would discourage the gritty Brazilian, and that may be the central theme of his story: Perseverance in the face of every adversity, and unrelenting hard work irrespective of encouragement or recompense.



# Up Close and Personal with Syra Yousuf

*Meet the actor who waited five years for the right role*



By Kaukab Jahan

**S**yra Yousuf is a well-known name in Pakistani entertainment industry. Whether it is television drama, feature film or modelling, she has made her presence felt on the power of her sheer talent and charm.

After starting her career as a VJ at MTV Pakistan when she was a schoolgirl, Syra rose to instant fame in the beginning of her television career by creating the role of Sarena in Tanhaiyan Naye Silsilay (2012), a sequel to Tanhaiyan (1986) penned by the legendary Haseena Moin.

A thorough professional, Syra took a break from acting to fulfil her responsibilities as mother. She is back as Arzoo Daniel in drama serial Sinf-e-Aahan being aired on ARY Digital.

Syra had a frank tete-a-tete with The Truth International (TTI) about her current characters, choice of roles and concern as a public figure.

**TTI: Why is there this huge gap – of almost five years – between your latest and previous drama?**

**SY:** Two things are very important to me when it comes to do any project. First, I can manage my work schedule with my personal responsibilities and second, the script must appeal to me. You may be surprised that half of the time, I couldn't find any interesting script during that period. I didn't want to do a drama just for the sake of being in one. I wanted to do a substantial role.

**TTI: You are playing a Punjabi Christian girl in Sinf-e-Aahan. How difficult or easy this character was for you?**

**SY:** It was decided by the director of the play Nadeem Baig and entire team from the beginning that we would keep this character, a very ordinary Pakistani middle class girl. We did not

want to show any stereotype on this character like if she is a Christian she would wear certain clothes or speak in a typical way. Arzoo is masters in English literature and wants to join army as an English language instructor.

**TTI: You also went to Pakistan Military Academy for this drama serial. Did you get any special training for your role there?**

**SY:** Not as such, we usually had our routine call timings for the shoots but yes during those shoots we had to learn some drills that were a bit tiring and exhausting especially in the last days as we had to finish it up on time. So, we had to work extra hours but it all ended up with the exciting results. We enjoyed it a lot.

**TTI: What was it like wearing a uniform for your character?**

**SY:** It was entirely different from what



I had thought about before going for the role. So when I wore the army uniform for my character, it gave me a feeling or sense of responsibility. It might be because of having a sense of representing an organization.

**TTI: Your fans have witnessed that you focused too much on modelling in last one and half years. Is it less time consuming than doing a drama or film project?**

**SY:** Laughs! Obviously, this medium is very different from acting. Its requirements are also different. I enjoyed modelling just not because it was easier or difficult but I see that these days our fashion projects are being projected very nicely and professionally. The directors behind them have a vision for their work which results in a beautiful product by the end. I think everybody would love to work on such well-crafted projects.

**TTI: In Pakistan, there is a too much trolling on the dressing of actors and models, especially on social media. What do you think the reason is?**

**SY:** [Looked surprised, then said, laughing] Wish I could know what is going on in their minds but one thing I believe is that every-

one in the society, including me, must know that we cannot invade or meddle in someone's personal life. One can criticize others' work with a view or opinion but as soon as they try to invade or commenting someone's personal life, it automatically becomes uncomfortable.

I think that we take decision of our lives thoughtfully, making choices we are comfortable with. People have a family and a background where they come from and conduct themselves according to those values. So suggesting what someone should or should not choose is not appropriate and must not be anyone else's business. May be what they consider wrong from their perspective is ok for others. So I think there is no need to get personal in anyone's matter. this moral policing on social media.

**TTI: How do you manage these trolls?**

**SY:** I think the only way to manage these things is to not pay any attention to them. I know it's very difficult, nearly impossible to avoid them, especially in this age of social media. You suffer their invasion in any of a number of ways including in the forms of memes and harsh comments. The only thing we can do is to not let this negative

stuff in. People are commenting according to their exposure and thinking. It doesn't have to be true about you.

**TTI: One of your feature films is under production in which your co-star is your former husband Shehroz Sabzwari. Generally women avoid working with their exes but you have decided to do it. Comments?**

**SY:** I think one should be professional when it comes to work and it is most important to me as well. Knowing that this project includes not just me or the other actors but also the people behind the camera whether they are producers, directors or assistant directors. Everybody has put in hard work in making this project a success. So I find it very unprofessional to upset the whole project just because of my personal thing.

**TTI: Any character which you still want to do?**

**SY:** To me a character or script itself gives me an instinct to accept it. I think if I start to plan sketches in my mind for my desired characters, then much time would be wasted in search of those particular roles.



# BBC's Film Parade from 2021

*Warning: Binge-watcher discretion is advised*

By Ayesha Javaid

Covid-19 has been with us for around two years now, and the movie industry has been among the worst hit by it. However, coping strategies have changed between 2020 and 2021.

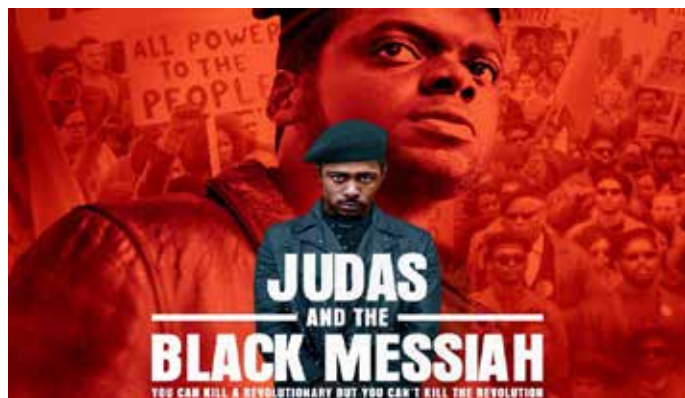
While most of the movies scheduled to be released in 2020 saw their theatrical releases put off or were shunted to streaming and on-demand platforms, 2021 saw the pendulum swing back with many more films hitting theatres.

But as always, some of these were hits (including some you better not miss) and others were misses (including some you should not to touch with a ten foot pole). The best strategy, however, would be to stick with the best of the best – and who better to judge for you than BBC Culture film critics Nicholas Barber and Caryn James?

The duo have painstakingly put together a list of 20 best films released in 2021, which we thought to share with our readers verbatim as a New Year offering.

## Judas and the Black Messiah

The true story of Fred Hampton, the Black Panther Party leader who was murdered in 1969 on orders from the FBI, becomes high drama in director Shaka King's film, which is by turns suspenseful, action-filled and intimate. Daniel Kaluuya's Oscar-nominated performance as Hampton is so charismatic – he was a passionate revolutionary and a dynamo of a public speaker – that it demonstrates why the FBI feared Hampton would become a Messiah. LaKeith Stanfield brings wiliness and desperation to the Judas figure, who infiltrates the Panthers for the government and betrays Hampton. Beyond these electrifying personal stories, the film's themes of black power and police abuse resonate profoundly with social justice movements today. (CJ)



## The Green Knight

The Green Knight features castles, giants, witches and damsels in distress, just like countless swords-and-sorcery adventures before it. But such time-honoured elements have never seemed as mysterious or as magical as they do in this dreamlike film, adapted from the 14th-Century poem by David Lowery (A Ghost Story / The Old

Man and the Gun). Dev Patel plays Gawain, a callow knight who is so keen to impress King Arthur (Sean Harris) that he beheads a monstrous tree-man (Ralph Ineson). The trouble is that the tree-man then strolls off, and chivalric honour dictates that Gawain must seek him out for a rematch a year later. His quest can be bewildering, but the imagery and imagination will have you gasping from first frame to the last. (NB)



## Raya and the Last Dragon

Funny, colourful and action-filled, this Disney family film set in the fictional ancient Asian kingdom of Kumandra is a delight. Raya is a young warrior heroine (voiced with the perfect mix of spirit and doubt by Kelly Marie Tran) who must find the last surviving magical dragon so she can defeat the powers of evil and save her father. That dragon turns out to be the traditional, energetic, smart-mouthed comic sidekick, played by the ideally cast Awkwafina. With Daniel Dae Kim as Raya's father and Gemma Chan as her fearsome rival, the film is a visual swirl of shape-shifting and fast-paced adventure, featuring a non-sugary lesson about learning to trust. (CJ)

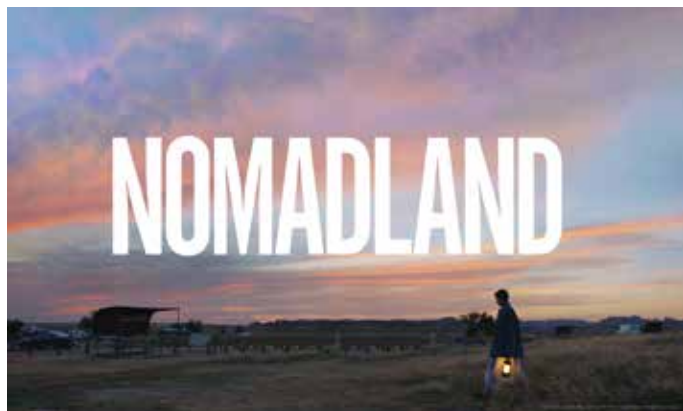


## Nomadland

Chloé Zhao follows The Rider – one of 2017's best films – with another humane and hypnotic survey of the kind of marginal American life that Hollywood usually ignores. Adapted from the book by Jessica Bruder, Nomadland stars Frances McDormand as Fern, a retired widow with no children. Like a surprising number of her



fellow pensioners, she can't afford to stay in her house, so she packs her few belongings into an old RV and drives around the desert (stunningly shot by Joshua James Richards). McDormand is one of the only professional actors in the cast – in most scenes she interacts with real nomads who recount their own experiences. But she and Zhao blur the boundaries between fact and fiction so skillfully that Fern never seems out of place. *Nomadland* is a wonderful achievement. Apart from *The Rider*, there aren't any films quite like it. (NB)



## The Lost Daughter

Maggie Gyllenhaal brings a true artist's vision to her first film as writer-director, an adaptation of Elena Ferrante's novel about Leda, a middle-aged professor, whose obsession with a younger mother and daughter she hardly knows brings her reeling back to examine her own past. Olivia Colman makes the imperfect heroine dynamic even in her quietest moments. Always impeccable, Colman has never been better. With Jessie Buckley playing Leda in flashbacks, and Dakota Johnson as the young woman Leda meets, the film is full of vibrant performances. Gyllenhaal captures all of Ferrante's nuance, but makes the story of women questioning their roles as mothers and as individuals its own entrancing work of art. (CJ)



## No Time to Die

Daniel Craig's emotional farewell to the Bond series was delayed and delayed, so it was a cause for celebration when *No Time to Die* finally made it to cinemas, and audiences were reminded of all the over-the-top entertainment that the silver screen had to offer. Cary Joji Fukuyama, the film's director, took a "go big or go home" approach, and spent almost three hours piling on fabulous locations and flamboyant action set pieces, giddy comedy and grave drama.

The most impressive part was that, along with the countless callbacks to previous Bond films and novels, there were a number of shocking new developments. That's not bad going, 60 years into a crowd-pleasing franchise. The only question now is: where can 007 possibly go next? (NB)

## West Side Story

It would be hard to mess up *West Side Story*, with music so exquisite it can overcome any problems. It is even harder to create a film as glorious as Steven Spielberg's inspired new version, full of life and energy. The film honours the beauty of the Leonard Bernstein-Stephen Sondheim score, while adding a 21st-Century sensibility that includes a diverse cast and heightened awareness of the ethnic rivalry that divides its star-crossed lovers. Rachel Zegler is the ideal Maria, and Ariana DeBose a kinetic Anita, but Rita Moreno (the original Anita on stage and screen) is the true heart of the film. As a kind neighbourhood storeowner helpless to stop the hatred and violence she sees all around her, Moreno helps makes the classic story new. (CJ)



## Passing

Rebecca Hall makes the leap from actor to writer-director – and not many people have done so with such elegance and intelligence. *Passing*, her delicate, melancholy adaptation of Nella Larsen's novel, stars Tessa Thompson and Ruth Negga as two well-to-do black women who bump into each other in New York in the 1920s, years after they were childhood friends. While one of them is now a society hostess and "Negro rights" activist in Harlem, the other has convinced everyone that she is actually white, including her proudly racist husband (Alexander Skarsgård). Shot in gorgeous, glowing black and white, this is a spellbinding drama in which endless grievances and yearnings are implied but left unspoken by its careful characters. (NB)

## Drive My Car

Yes, the title brings to mind the Beatles song, but it shouldn't. Japanese director Ryusuke Hamaguchi has created one of the most unusual and eloquent films of recent years. Yusuke (Hidetoshi

Nishijima, quiet yet profound) is an actor and stage director whose wife dies early in the film. Two years later he is staging a multilingual production of Chekov's *Uncle Vanya* in Hiroshima, where a young woman becomes his driver. Her history and her grief are different from his, yet together they come to terms with the past and the future. *Drive My Car* is a film of conversations and theatre rehearsals, of confidences and secrets, all so beautifully lived in that the three-hour running time never seems long or slow. The film light-handedly mirrors *Uncle Vanya* in its sense of lost chances, wasted time, and the need to go on living. (CJ)



## Titane

*Titane* is a Cronenbergish sci-fi body horror movie about a serial killer (ferocious newcomer Agathe Rousselle) who finds herself pregnant with the oily offspring of a car. And yet, somehow, Julie Ducornau's juicy slice of extreme cinema is even weirder than that summary might suggest. A nightmarish yet mischievously comic and ultimately tender barrage of transgressive sex, bone-crunching violence, lurid lighting and pounding music, *Titane* prompted more yelps, winces, uneasy chuckles, and gasps of disbelief than any other film this year. It was also the second ever film directed by a woman to win the Palme d'Or at Cannes. (NB)



## Petite Maman

Celine Sciamma brings all the visual beauty of *Portrait of a Lady on Fire* to this very different, dreamlike little masterpiece, which has the aura of a fairy tale and the grip of real life. Nelly is an eight-year-old staying in an isolated house in the woods, which her divorced parents are clearing out after the death of her grandmother. She wanders into the woods and meets another girl,

Josephine, her double – the girls are played by real-life twins – whom we slowly come to realise has a supernatural connection to Nelly's own mother. The child's imagination and point of view allow Sciamma to speculate about grief and identity in this lyrical, mysterious, thoroughly absorbing work that exists on the line between magic and emotional truth. (CJ)

## The Power of the Dog

Twenty-eight years after the release of *The Piano*, Jane Campion brings us another atmospheric period drama shot in the wilds of New Zealand. But *The Power of the Dog* is darker and stranger than her previous masterpiece, and horribly gripping in its own right. It also boasts one of Benedict Cumberbatch's most transformative performances as a venomous Montana rancher who resents his strait-laced brother (Jesse Plemons) and his timid new sister-in-law (Kirsten Dunst). Adapted from Thomas Savage's novel, the slow-burning tale of toxic masculinity seems at first to be an epic Western, but it becomes a brooding gothic melodrama set in a world that feels supernaturally creepy yet completely real. (NB)



## Summer of Soul (...or, When the Revolution Could Not Be Televised)

This joyous documentary about a long-forgotten 1969 music festival, sometimes called the Black Woodstock, is an intellectually astute, vibrant piece of history. In his first film as director, Ahmir (Questlove) Thompson expertly curates the festival's exhilarating performances from Stevie Wonder, Nina Simone, Mahalia Jackson, The 5th Dimension and many others, putting them in the context of the festival's tense political moment, in the shadow of Dr Martin Luther King Jr's assassination just one year before. Expertly balancing entertainment and political purpose, the film isn't a nostalgic journey into the past: it reclaims a lost piece of history, repositioning it for our own era of racial awareness. (CJ)

## The Father

Anthony (an Oscar-winning Anthony Hopkins) is a sprightly 80-something who is enjoying retirement in his beloved London flat. His daughter (Olivia Colman) is caring and attentive, but the people and the furniture around him keep changing, giving *The Father* the feel of a horror movie – and in a way it is. The conceit is that Anthony has dementia, and most of the film is shown from his perspective. It's chilling, upsetting, but utterly gripping, because



you never know what will happen next and how it will connect to what's gone before. Not that *The Father* is a mere exercise in technical ingenuity. Florian Zeller's grief-racked drama, which he adapted from his own play with the help of Christopher Hampton, makes you dread having an infirm parent, and makes you dread becoming one even more. (NB)

## The Tragedy of Macbeth

Perhaps only someone with Joel Coen's credentials could have got this commercially unlikely, black-and-white Shakespeare film made, but it's great that he did. His intense, pared-down vision of one of Shakespeare's most accessible and enduring plays is a stunner. Denzel Washington's powerfully contained performance as Macbeth gives us the essence of a man driven by ambition and tortured by guilt. Frances McDormand's Lady Macbeth is his match, and the bond between them sends them on the irreversible path to tragedy. The settings, most of them interiors, are theatrical, geometric and luminous, but the film is pure cinema as we close in on the faces of characters whose every move might bring them closer to glory or to death. Kathryn Hunter is haunting as all three witches in this lucid, richly imagined drama. (CJ)



## Supernova

This tender tribute to love and friendship stars Colin Firth as an English concert pianist and Stanley Tucci as his partner, an American author with early-onset dementia. As the men drive through the scenic Lake District in their trusty camper van, they have to face up to the likelihood that this will be their final holiday together – and work out what to do next. It's a heart-wrenching scenario, but for now the couple is a pleasure to be around: gentle, funny, open, and glowing with uncomplicated affection. The film is, too. Without ever veering into sentimentality, Harry Macqueen's highly polished script and sensitive direction convey just how precious the men's connection is, and how devastating it will be for them to lose it. (NB)

## Night of the Kings

Harsh realism meets legend in Philippe Lacôte's audacious, genre-bending drama. It is set in a run-down prison in the Ivory Coast, but its soul belongs to the storytelling traditions of African griots and Scheherazade. The inmates, roaming free in a courtyard, enact a ritual in which a chosen prisoner must tell a story all night or be killed. The young victim recounts his first-hand knowledge, or so he says, of a notorious criminal. As we see flashbacks to that tale, fact veers into myth, and a queen with supernatural powers goes into battle. At times prisoners chant and move in stylised, choreographed motions to mirror the narrative, in an artful film that immerses us in the life-saving power of stories. (CJ)

## Flee

At a time when migrants are in the headlines on an almost daily basis, Jonas Poher Rasmussen's vital documentary uses a chatty interview format, and limpid 2D animation, to turn one asylum seeker from a statistic into a human being. The Afghan interviewee, a friend of Rasmussen's, recalls his traumatising and exhausting experiences: his father's arrest by the Taliban in Kabul, his family's escape to a Moscow tower block, his terrifying dealings with corrupt policemen and brutal human traffickers, and his solo trip to Copenhagen, where he was forced to keep his past a secret. This is a heart-rending but hopeful film that should be seen by everyone – and by politicians in particular. (NB)

## The Human Voice

Running only 30 minutes, this emotionally potent, visually dazzling little film comes from two masters. Directed by Pedro Almodóvar and starring Tilda Swinton, the drama is loosely based on Jean Cocteau's 1930 play, in which a woman talks on the phone to a man who has abandoned her. Almodóvar adds a meta twist as Swinton wanders from a deserted stage set into an apartment, suggesting she is playing a film role. Yet her tumultuous feelings are visceral. In voiceover and on her mobile phone, she speaks to the lover who has left her, cascading from defiant pride to pleading to resilience. In Balenciaga clothes, including a glamorous vermilion gown, Swinton roams around one of the most colourful sets in all of Almodóvar-dom, giving her character's monologue intimacy and urgency, until her old life goes up in flames. (CJ)

## Another Round

Thomas Vinterberg mixes an intoxicating cocktail of comedy and drama in *Another Round* (or *Druk*, to use its original Danish title), pouring out an outrageous premise and then combining it with sympathy and respect for the characters. The premise is that a history teacher (Mads Mikkelsen) and three of his closest colleagues decide to cope with middle age by drinking all day and hoping that no one else notices. Their experiment serves as both an uproarious celebration of alcohol and a piquant warning against becoming dependent on it. And Mikkelsen has never been better. His performance is a masterclass in subtlety and reserve, at least until he shows off his wildest jazz-ballet moves in the glorious final sequence. (NB)



MPCL

# FUELLING

## THE NATIONAL ECONOMY

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

**MARI PETROLEUM COMPANY LIMITED**

☎ 051 111-410-410    ✉ [info@mpcl.com.pk](mailto:info@mpcl.com.pk)    🌐 [mpcl.com.pk](http://mpcl.com.pk)



# HBL



PAKISTAN BANKING AWARDS

THE INSTITUTE OF BANKERS PAKISTAN

DAWN | A-FERGUSON&CO. | 67, Regency Road

## Together, we succeed.

HBL is proud to serve its valued clients. In recognition of its efforts, the Bank has won the **"Best Bank"** and **"Best Bank for Small & Medium Businesses"** at the Pakistan Banking Awards 2021.

These wins are a tribute to millions of clients' continued trust and confidence in HBL.



EUROMONEY  
AWARDS 2021  
**Best Bank  
in Pakistan**



PAKISTAN  
BANKING AWARDS  
**Best Bank  
2021**



111-111-425



[www.hbl.com](http://www.hbl.com)



HBL Mobile

