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CONTENTS

Editorial

Dangerous! By Hammad Ghaznavi – **Page 04**

Opinion

Anarkali Terrorist Attack by M A Niazi – **Page 05**

Politics

The Republic of Long Marches by Khalid Wasim – **Page 07**

Is Imran Khan's Party Cracking Under Pressure? By Ahmad Waleed – **Page 09**

Big Days Ahead for Election Commission of Pakistan by Sarfraz Raja – **Page 11**

Foreign Affairs

The Quartet Rising by Naveed Miraj – **Page 13**

Parsing Pakistan's New-Fangled National Security Policy by Arsim Tariq – **Page 14**

The Proliferation of the Armed Drone by Umer Farooq – **Page 16**

The Anatomy of Afghanistan's Grim Human Catastrophe by Haq Nawaz Khan – **Page 18**

Pakistan is the Top Recipient of US Global Vaccine Deliveries by Zarghon Shah – **Page 20**

The Battle for Ukraine by Dr Khalid Bajwa – **Page 22**

Boris Johnson's Existential Crisis by Shahmir Niazi – **Page 24**

No Safe Harbour for Perpetrators of Crimes Against Humanity - TTI Report – **Page 26**

COVID-19

The Day of Omicron by Noor Aftab – **Page 30**

Economy

Higher Savings and Higher Productivity Remain Key to Economic Growth by Mehtab Haider – **Page 32**

Soaring Energy Prices Hit Pakistan Where it Hurts by Javed Mahmood – **Page 34**

Investigation

Taming Pakistan's Public Debt Problem by Azeem Waqas – **Page 36**

Disciplinary Gangs and the Marginalisation of Dissent in Pakistan by Arsim Tariq – **Page 38**

Not So Fast, Says EASA by Hamza Qureshi – **Page 40**

Technology

Healthtech Will Be No Substitute for Human Touch, Even in 2022 by Amna Shoaib – **Page 41**

Finally, a Digital Utopia - from Japan No Less - TTI Report – **Page 42**

History

End Times: A Muslim Perspective (Part 3) By Azmat M Saqib – **Page 44**

Working Class Leadership is the Key by Rana Azam – **Page 46**

Entertainment

What's the Big Deal about Humayun Saeed Playing Princess Di's Pakistani Love Interest? By Kaukab Jahan – **Page 48**

Scent of a Human - TTI Report – **Page 50**

Sports

Pakistan's Year of Cricket Glory Ends in Grand Style by Ali Abdullah – **Page 52**

Why are Officials Lukewarm to Raja's Quadrangular T20I Tournament? By Shahmir Niazi – **Page 53**

Pakistan Winter Sports Incubator in the Making by Pavan Manzoor – **Page 54**

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Dangerous!

By Hammad Ghaznavi

In a one-and-a-half hours PTV program, a live call session with the Prime minister, Imran Khan talked about various issues but one of his sentences riveted all the attention: “If ousted from the government, I would be more dangerous for you.” The warning by the PM initiated a raging debate on the social media, to whome he was threatening? The Opposition insisted that Mr Khan, smelling danger, was warning the powerful quarters that traditionally eject the prime ministers in Pakistan, of the unsavory consequences if he was jilted; while the government ministers and spokespersons vociferously asserted that the PM’s remarks were directed at the Opposition, avowedly committed to ousting the PM. Whatever the truth may be, the statement generated a frenzied controversy all around.

Look at the backdrop to comprehend the significance of the statement. Imran Khan’s opposition may be described as the weakest in our political history. The Opposition alliance PDM lasted 6 months, with the PPP deciding to get out of the fold. JUI chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman’s huge dharna had to leave empty handed from Islamabad in November 2019 as, according to him, he was betrayed by the Establishment. PML-N was kept busy throughout Imran’s term, dealing with ‘jails and bails’ of its leading lights.

The only serious effort made by the opposition to dent the government in parliament met with an embarrassment when despite having a majority in Senate it failed to oust Chairman Sadiq Sanjarani

in August 2019. The opposition has failed to thwart any legislation in the National Assembly, including the mini-budget last month. The disarray in the opposition ranks may be measured by the two different dates of Long March given by the PDM (23rd March) and PPP (27th February). History testifies, the opposition in Pakistan, however strong, has never been able to oust a government through street agitation without backing of the mighty of the land. There are reasons for the ‘misinterpretation’ of Mr Khan’s statement.

No two opinions, Imran Khan came into power in 2018 with the blessings of the garrison. The hybrid regime was conceived as a long term arrangement. The Sharifs and Zardaris were discarded ‘forever’ under this scheme. Why would the mighty of the land abandon their plan and go back to the drawing board? What may force the hand of the creator to destroy the universe he himself created and go back to the ‘fallen angels’?

Leave the opposition apart, the PTI backers are seriously hurt by its performance. Inflation has been the biggest enemy of the government. Pakistan is the third worst inflation case with a figure of over 12 percent, according to a recent survey by The Economist. The prices of essential food items, gas, electricity, petrol and medicine have multiplied manifolds, making life tougher for the common man. Unemployment and shrinking incomes have only made matters worse.

A corruption-free Pakistan was the chief

slogan of the Khan government. That slogan became an embarrassment for the government as there is an alleged long list of financial scandals against the PTI bigwigs including sugar, LNG, medicine, dollar rise, Malam Jabba, billion tree tsunami, and BRT Peshawar. Various promises to fix the mafias involved have yielded zilch. This perception is further cemented by the recently released Corruption Perception Index by Transparency International wherein Pakistan has further dropped by 16 spots to 140th in the world, far below the 117th position under the PML-N government.

The Khan government’s accountability drive, friends and foes agree, has turned out to be a bad joke. Despite jailing almost all prominent opposition leaders from Nawaz Sharif and Shehbaz Sharif to Asif Zardari, not a single paisa has been recovered. Now, with the ouster of accountability czar Shehzad Akbar, the drive seems to have lost all steam.

It is against this uninspiring background that the signatories of the ‘same page’ got unprecedented public flak for engineering the present setup responsible for their mounting miseries. As it was not enough, the unsavoury process of the DGISI appointment, many argue, further convinced the powerful quarters to go back to the drawing board. A few key upcoming appointments in the Institution, analysts argue, have put a timeframe to these backstage developments.

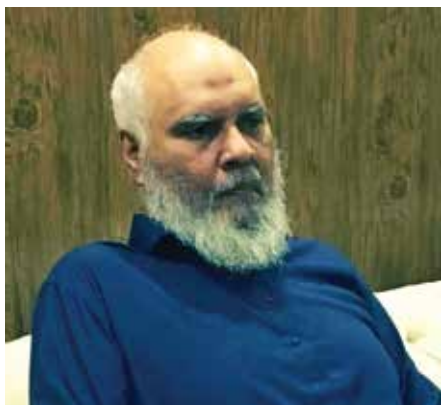
So, who was Mr. Khan threatening when he said: “If ousted from the government, I would be more dangerous for you.”



Anarkali Terrorist Attack

Blast or security alert?

By M A Niazi



The blast at Lahore raised a number of specters, the most worrisome being that the USA has once again abandoned Pakistan to face the blowback from Afghanistan. The irony of Pakistan having presented a National Security Policy just before the blast, is striking.

At a very basic level, the blast in Anarkali was meant to terrorize. It was not just that it took place away from Afghanistan, but that it took place in a crowded market. The message was clear: that any market in any city in Pakistan was vulnerable.

This was hardly unfamiliar. Pakistanis had spent two decades facing just such a situation, but since last September, expected that this would come to an end. After all, the Taliban had won, and thus Pakistan had been vindicated.

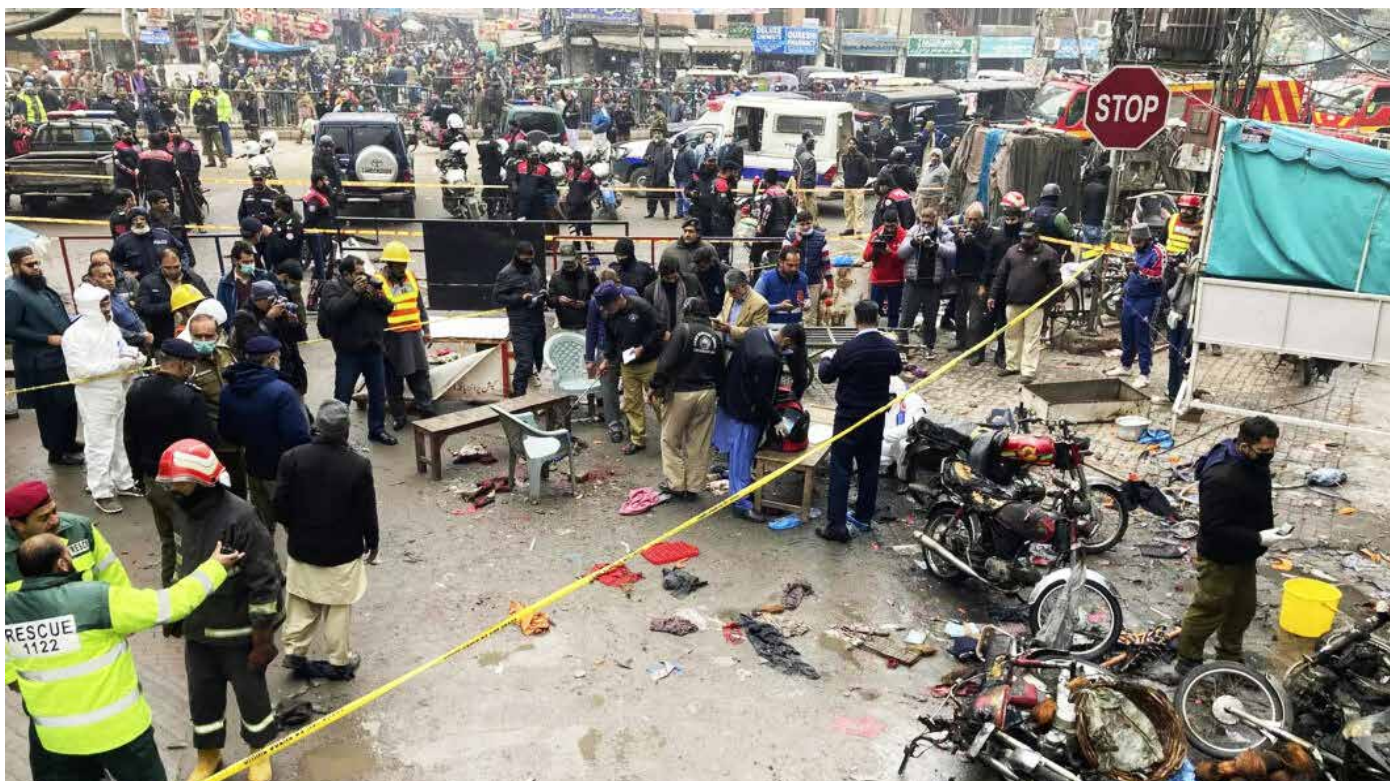
However, support of the Taliban in the 1990s had led to the formation of the Tehrik-i-Taliban (TTP) Pakistan, which aimed at two things: supporting the Afghan Taliban and bringing Pakistan under Taliban rule. When the Taliban were ousted, the TTP changed the first aim to support of the resistance, and the second to killing Shias and other religious minorities. Now, it seems, while the TTP has declared allegiance to the Afghan Taliban, its secondary aim (which is actually now its sole aim) is to fight the Pakistan Army.

Thus it now seems that its aim is not just random terror, but to bring the Army back to the negotiation table. The Afghan Taliban used the tactic quite successfully against the USA, of stepping up their resistance in intervals of negotiating. True, the US Army was essentially an occupying

force, while the Pakistan Army is a national army. It might be noted, though, that the Afghan Taliban did not negotiate with the US Army, but with the US government. Are the talks with the Pakistan Army merely because the TTP sees no point in talking to the political government?

The demands that the TTP made during the last negotiation are not such as can be fulfilled by anyone. There was a disconnect that made it impossible for the Army to continue. Did it reflect the views of the Taliban? The Kabul government has been careful to distance itself from the TTP, and it seems to wish to be part of the present international system, something the TTP does not wish to do. It has not agreed to take any action against the Taliban, thus providing it the kind of sanctuary the TTP had in the Waziristan Agencies.

Their demand that the Tribal Area status be reversed is perhaps the biggest non-starter of all, for the merger was achieved by the passage of a constitutional amendment by Parliament, and to get the majorities



needed to get the amendment passed is probably beyond the ability of the ruling PTI. It should not be forgotten that the KP Assembly would also have to pass an enabling resolution, and there is no certainty that the PTI would be able to do so, vast majority as it enjoys in the KP Assembly.

However, the demand that they be allowed to open a political office in another country is perhaps the biggest nonstarter of all, not so much for what it shows of their own picture of themselves as the difficulty they might face in getting such an office, no matter what assurances they might have got. It should not be forgotten that the Afghan government did not look kindly upon Qatar for hosting the Taliban office. Thus if the TTP is looking to Afghanistan, it should remember that while the Afghan Taliban have shown that they are not Pakistani puppets, they will listen enough to Pakistan to avoid giving as much offence as hosting an office would.

The TTP is a dangerous organization of militants. Its leaders are not known as religious scholars, the way Maulana Abul Ala Maududi (of the Jamaat Islami) is because of his monumental Tafheemul Quran, or Sayyid Qutb (of the Ikhwanul Muslimeen) for his Fi Zilal al-Quran, the exegesis of the Holy Quran he wrote while in jail. Both have been influential well beyond their parties.

This lack of ideological input might point to

another motive. This becomes even more obvious if one notes how the Baloch Liberation Army cropped up in the Lahore blast. It took responsibility, but the Interior Minister seems to discount that. However, whether the BLA made a false claim, or someone made a false claim on its behalf, there is no denying that the BLA could well make the claim.

The BLA and the TTP are opposed to each other in Balochistan. They face each other across an ethnic divide, with the BLA deriving support among Baloch, and the TTP among Pashtuns. While Baloch youth avoid madrassas, Pashtuns have attended them in large numbers. The two militant organizations have ideological differences as well, for the BLA has a liberal leftist ideology, unlike the TTP.

However, the pool of young men from which they recruit have this much in common; they are both finding out that the education they have got is not all that it is cracked up to be. It does not prepare them for the job market, and thus they are left at something of a loose end.

This dovetails with the National Security Policy, which might ultimately bite the hand that created it. The NSP has been criticized for not having any input from stakeholders, but is that to misunderstand the nature of the policy. It was drafted by an institution that believes that it knows better than civilian institutions, and may have

been meant for a foreign audience, to convince other countries that Pakistan is no longer a security state, but one ready to concentrate on geo-economics. Unfortunately, India, its main interlocutor, is not ready for this, and has come under the sway of a party which seeks to undo the Partition.

However, the NSP also has another dimension. It may also be seen as a guarantee of what is expected of any government that comes to office, a sort of bare minimum that must be followed by any government coming to office. In an indirect fashion, it is an admission that the PTI may not obtain re-election. It also reflects the desires of the same forces that desire a consensus on economic projects and decisions. However, the NSP also promotes internal security, so the NSP was shown as not worth as much as it was supposed to be by the blast.

The Lahore blast therefore ended up asking a very searching question: what should be the price of peace? And who can deliver it? That was a problem the USA faced in Afghanistan. Could the Taliban guarantee a safe withdrawal? As it turned out, they couldn't, and the US withdrawal was marred by an IS bomb blast. The last time demands of extremists were accepted by Pakistan was in 1971. Can either the BLA or the TTP hope to have their demands met in similar fashion.



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The Republic of Long Marches

With three separate opposition protest marches set to converge on Islamabad, the month of March promises to be interesting



By Khalid Wasim

The month of March has traditionally been associated with smartly turned out units of Pakistan's various armed forces marching in the federal capital to cheers of thousands including national leadership and foreign dignitaries – to mark the country's republic day – branded as Pakistan Day since Ayub Khan's military rule.

This march, however, the federal capital may have to host to at least three other marches, all staged by opposition political parties to protest against the incumbent government. The nation is therefore expected to have an eventful March this year.

The Pakistan Democratic Movement (PDM) is adamant on holding its already-announced long march towards Islamabad on Pakistan Day, ignoring the requests of the government to delay the protest due to the security concerns and presence of some foreign dignitaries in the country at that time.

The PDM plans to begin its sit-in at the famous D-Chowk soon after the ceremonial march past of the country's armed forces on the Pakistan Day at the Parade Ground, situated near the entry point of the capital, as the PDM alliance chief Maulana Fazlur Rehman has already stated that there is no chances of "conflict" as the protesters will enter Islamabad after the ceremonial military parade is over.

Former prime minister Nawaz Sharif's Pakistan Muslim League-Nawaz (PML-N) is the major partner of the coalition, followed by Maulana Fazlur Rehman's Jamiat-e-Ulema-e-Islam (JUI).

Another major opposition party – the Pakistan Peoples Party (PPP) – has given a separate call for its own anti-government long march to the capital. The PPP has announced that participants of the long march would begin their journey from Karachi on February 27 and they are expected to enter the capital by 1 or 2 March.

Finally, a smaller player albeit with considerable street clout, and the Jamaat-i-Islami (JI) has asked its workers and activists to prepare for a "decisive" long march to the capital also in the month of March. The party is yet to announce a final date.

The JI, however, is set to begin a series of protest sit-ins at the Tehsil, district and provincial level in various parts of the country from February 6 and vowed to hold over 100 such sit-ins before the final call for the long march.

With the opposition parties intent on putting on power shows in March, the ruling Pakistan Tehreek-i-Insaf (PTI) has come out with a unique idea of organising a convention for the overseas Pakistanis in Islamabad in the

second or third week of March, to be addressed by Prime Minister Imran Khan.

While it is difficult to see how these political carnivals pose any immediate threat to the present set-up under the PTI, the body language and the threatening tone of Prime Minister Imran Khan during his televised address on 23 January shows that he has some internal fears and all is not well on his side.

Expressing confidence that the people would never take to the streets against him, especially on the call of the 'tainted' opposition, Mr Khan warned that if he was forced out of the office, he would become even more dangerous for his opponents.

"If I exit the government, I will pose a greater threat to you. Right now, I am sitting quietly in my office and watching the drama unfold. But if I take to the streets, you will have nowhere to hide," he said while answering callers' questions regarding the country's political situation.

In his address, the prime minister once again arrogantly refused to have any interaction with PML-N President Shahbaz Sharif, the Leader of Opposition in National Assembly. He went on saying that he could talk to the Tehreek-i-Labbaik Pakistan or even the



disgruntled Baloch nationalists, he would never sit down with Mr Sharif — even for dialogue on key national issues.

Giving the reason, he said, it would be tantamount to compromising over the corruption of the Sharif family. He even said that he did not consider Mr Sharif an opposition leader.

Responding to the latest tirade against the Sharifs, the PML-N declared Mr Khan “medically unfit” to hold any office. PML-N’s information secretary Marriyum Aurangzeb at a hard-hitting news conference said Mr Khan’s address raised serious questions regarding his “mental fitness” to hold the office “he was imposed upon after the in July 2018 elections.”

The opposition ridiculed the prime minister’s remarks, stating that when Imran Khan was “ranting” from the container, he used to threaten that he would go after everyone once in power, and after staying in power for nearly four years, he was threatening that he would not spare anyone if he was thrown out of power.

According to the opposition, it was an outburst of a desperate, frustrated loser who was consumed by the fear of losing power that he never deserved. “This speech is a good news for the nation because it clearly shows that Imran has already accepted his fate that his time in office is over”, said Ms Aurangzeb.

Some political analysts believe that Mr Khan has used a double-edged weapon as he has not only warned the opposition, but also conveyed a message simultaneously to the real political players in the country. Many opposition leaders believe so, although they are still unsure if the PTI still has the backing of the “establishment”.

It was because of this uncertainty that the PDM dropped the idea of tabling no confidence motion against the prime minister, the National Assembly speaker, or the deputy speaker in the parliament.

Talking to reporters after attending the PDM meeting in which the no trust motion option was thread-barely discussed by the leadership, including Nawaz Sharif, PML-N’s Senior Vice-President Shahid Khaqan Abbasi reportedly said in order to make the no confidence successful, they

would be requiring the support of at least 172 members in the 342-member house, which they presently did not have.

He said they would move the motion when they are sure to have the support of 172 members in the assembly and that the “establishment” was not behind the ruling coalition. “We are hopeful that keeping in view the current situation in the country, the establishment will not support [the government]. When the establishment will not interfere, the no confidence will succeed,” Mr Abbasi said.

He said previously there was an impression that the establishment had withdrawn its support to the present set-up, but then he claimed that the treasury members had told them that they received telephone calls for voting in the National Assembly on the money bill and the State Bank bill.

On the occasion, Mr Abbasi cunningly taunted the establishment by saying that the members had received the calls despite the claim of the ISPR (the Inter-Services Public Relations) that the military was not backing any political player in the country.

He was apparently referring to the 5 January press conference of the ISPR head Maj-Gen Babar Iftikhar, who in response to a query had categorically denied reports in some political and media circles that a “deal” was being worked out for the return of former prime minister Nawaz Sharif and termed such reports as “baseless speculation.”

“Ask those who are speculating, who is doing the deal, what is the objective/evidence? Ask for details,” Gen Babar had said, while terming the state of civil-military ties in “good shape.”

Still, although there seems to be no threat to the PTI from outside, it seems that all is not well within the ruling party. The party leadership has recently issued show-cause notices to MNA Noor Alam Khan and former information secretary of the party Ahmed Jawad for their open criticism on the government. These notices were issued by the party after reports in the media about Defence Minister Perviz Khattak confronting the prime minister in a party meeting.

The report of the scrutiny committee of the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) on

the foreign funding case has also put the ruling PTI on the back foot as things are not going in its favour as the case nears its conclusion.

And then there is the damning report of the Transparency International (TI) which says that the perception of corruption in Pakistan has seen a rise for the third straight year, with the country sliding 16 places to rank 140th out of 180 countries.

In 2020, Pakistan’s CPI was 31 and it was ranked 124th out of 180 countries, but this year that score has fallen to 28, according to the report. Following the release of the TI report, the social media was flooded with the old clips showing Imran Khan quoting the TI reports while lashing out at the past rulers.

The TI report came only a day after Adviser to the PM on Accountability and Interior Shahzad Akbar resigned from the office without assigning any reason. There are reports that Mr Akbar has actually been sacked because of his unsatisfactory performance as the prime minister has recently in a TV interview admitted that his government has failed in carrying out the accountability process in the country.

There is no doubt that general sentiment of the public has turned against the ruling PTI, particularly after the passage of the Finance Supplementary Bill, generally known as the minibudget, which has brought a new wave of price-hike in the country. And confession by the prime minister that his party’s narrative of accountability has failed has further diminished the hopes of the PTI supporters.

Also, the results of the recently-held first phase of the local government elections in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and the cantonment boards’ polls in Punjab are sufficient to prove that the PTI has started losing ground.

Despite all this, it seems highly unlikely that the opposition will be able to effectively mobilise the masses and take advantage of the situation. However, if it succeeds in mustering a sizeable crowd and making the government commit some blunders while handling the situation, these parties will have a chance to present their credentials before the “selectors” for a replacement.



Is Imran Khan's Party Cracking Under Pressure?

While there are no signs of an organised insurgency within the party, multiple disjointed revolts have broken out in recent weeks



By Ahmad Waleed

With only 18 months to go before the next general election, and Prime Minister Imran Khan focused on steering Pakistan out of deep economic mess, multiple fissures have started to appear in the ranks of his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

Although there have always been instances of cabinet ministers and advisors expressing dissatisfaction or criticising the policies or decisions of the top leadership in private conversations, there is no precedent in party history of how Defence Minister Pervaz Khattak recently faced off against Prime Minister Imran Khan during a cabinet meeting.

Party insiders say Khattak flew into a rage and vented his anger, hitting out at the ministers who are not meeting the demands of his constituency.

"Unelected people are sitting in the cabinet and they are not bothering about the problems faced by the people in his area. If this goes on, we will not be able to vote for the mini-budget," he threatened.

This irked the prime minister, who said he would not be blackmailed. "If you don't want to vote, then don't. If you are not satisfied with me, I will give the government to someone else," the prime minister retorted.

Khattak left the meeting in anger, however, a couple of ministers persuaded him to return. Nonetheless, he later told the media that nothing has happened and he only had gone out of the room to smoke.

Pervaz Khattak is a very important PTI leader from the KP province which is considered the stronghold of the party. The

PTI suffered a setback when his close relatives Bilal Khattak and Jalal Khattak recently joined Pakistan Muslim League (Nawaz) while his nephew Ahad Khattak entered the ranks of Pakistan People's Party (PPP).

In other developments, MNA from Khyber Pakhtunkhwa Noor Alam and former information secretary of PTI Ahmad Jawad have also gone ballistic against the leadership.

Noor Alam is critical of the government policies which have led to a historic price-hike burdening the poor. He said these anti-people policies have resulted in a humiliating defeat in KP local bodies elections. He predicts the party policies will make things worse in the next general elections. Ahmad Jawad has levelled serious allegations against the party leader-



ship, questioning the 'regularisation' of Imran Khan's Bani Gala residence.

One rebel has been served with a show-cause notice while the other has been expelled from the party. Noor Alam Khan is highly likely to run in the next general election but not on a PTI ticket, one of his close associates has hinted.

Meanwhile, another PTI leader Maj (R) Tahir Sadiq from Attock in an interview on a local news channel lately called the entire team of Prime Minister Imran Khan a bunch of incompetents.

Earlier, the estranged leader of PTI Jahangir Tareen has already flexed his political muscle by claiming the support of about 30 members of parliament. Although the major grievances of the group members were resolved and Jahangir Tareen himself managed to get relief in the sugar scandal, it is strongly predicted that his group will contest election in 2023 out of PTI fold. If that happens, the group will likely play a major role in deciding who forms the next provincial government.

Many other parliamentarians belonging to the PTI, especially the electables have

shown serious reservations on the government performance and expressed doubts if the people contesting next elections on PTI tickets would be able to retain their seats in view of the extremely poor performance, indecisive economic policies, skyrocketing prices of the daily use items, failure in holding the previous rulers accountable, rising joblessness, inability to curb corruption, etc.

Frequent shuffling in cabinet and bureaucracy have also raised serious questions on the government's ability to deliver. The Punjab province, headed by Chief Minister Usman Buzdar, witnessed unprecedented turnover in all the major ministries and departments throughout the three and a half years of rule. A party that came to power with a vow to make a Naya (New) Pakistan could not get along with any of the chief secretaries and provincial police chiefs.

The Pakistan Muslim League (Q), the major ally of PTI in Punjab, has missed no opportunity to criticise its partner in government on issues like price-hike and bad governance. The PML-Q leaders claim many PTI politicians have been in contact

with them in case they decide to part ways with their party and join PML-Q in the next elections.

Political pundits believe PTI lawmakers are feeling the heat of the government's failure on multiple fronts. With the general election nearing, they are naturally under pressure from their constituents over the performance of a party that had bragged it would bring about a major change in Pakistan, especially providing relief to the downtrodden class of the country. It has instead burdened the masses with unprecedented inflation.

Analysts say the cracks within the party are not a good omen to the party which is in the middle of finding a way out of the economic mess and devising an election strategy for 2023.

PTI stalwarts, nevertheless, have a strong belief in their leader Imran Khan who, they say, is the master of making a turnaround when he takes the stage. However, many observers think the dream of change is fading away faster than it was thought and the PTI does not stand a second chance unless the 'umpire' decides to stand firmly behind it once more.





Big Days Ahead for Election Commission of Pakistan

ECP ruling in foreign funding case promises to be momentous, as does its approach to introducing EVMs in time for the next general election



By Sarfraz Raja

The coming months are going to be crucial for the Election Commission of Pakistan. It is set to decide the momentous and historic foreign funding case, which will have a bearing on the fate of the incumbent government. Also, it has on its hands the difficult task provided under new legislation passed by parliament about the use of electronic voting machines in the coming general election, due before October 2023.

Foreign funding case

The much awaited scrutiny committee report about ruling Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party funds is now public, sparking criticism from opposition parties for hiding of bank accounts and alleged funding received from foreign sources.

The scrutiny report mentions that PTI under-reported the funding of raised in the four-year period between 2009 to 2013 by PKR 312 million. The magnitude of under-reporting for fiscal year 2012-13 alone stood at PKR 145 million. Then there is the matter of the party disclosing just 12

out of the at least 77 bank accounts maintained with various banks.

After the arrival of the security committee report, the ECP has now started hearing of case where PTI has to prove its stance of not getting any foreign funding and also clarification for hiding of some bank accounts. After listening to arguments from both sides, the ECP would give its verdict.

But the Commission is incomplete right now as two of its members appointment is still to be made by government.

The ECP comprises five member, one from each province and a Chief Election Commissioner. Two of its provincial members retire after every two and half years. ECP members from Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa retired in September last year and new appointment are yet to be made.

So an incomplete Commission is in working for last more than five months. ECP sources think that the Commission would wait for appointment of two of its

new members before ruling in the case.

Akbar Sher Babar who was a founder member of PTI and held various top slots in party including central secretary information, vice president, and member of central executive committee is petitioner in this case who moved the ECP in 2014 against alleged foreign funding received by PTI.

After scrutiny committee report being made public recently, he filed a new complaint before ECP that certain parts of scrutiny committee report were kept secret. PTI's counsel Anwar Mansoor had contended that there are certain flaws in the report which must be amended. ECP turned down PTI's request to keep certain parts of the scrutiny committee's report confidential.

In its written order, the ECP said no document of the scrutiny committee was confidential. Applicant Akbar S Babar welcomed this decision. He said that now all documents, including eight volumes acquired through State Bank of Pakistan, which were kept secret, will now be shared with him.



Meanwhile, the ECP directed the scrutiny committee formed to probe foreign funding of the PPP and PML-N to submit a report in the next 10 days.

EVMs

The parliament passed government-led legislation in joint sitting of both Houses of Parliament just less than two year before general elections 2023 for use of electronic voting machines, which the ECP says is a difficult task. Legally bound to implement this legislation, the ECP has since constituted three different committees to make plans for its implementation. The first of these is to look into the technical aspects, the second into financial cost of the process, and the third is to point out difficulties and suggest amendments to the existing laws and rules.

After passage of legislation regarding electronic and iVoting by the parliament, ECP in a letter to government asked to provide funds and infrastructure. The Letter written by Secretary Election Commission to Secretary Parliamentary Affairs said that the ECP would have to purchase more than 800,000 EVMS for the

next general election, adding that it required a warehouse over 3 acres of land for the storage of these machines. Besides, the ECP would need a building to set up a datacenter, a control center, a modern lab, and facility for printing and training sessions.

The ECP letter explained that its tasks included selection of appropriate technology with suitable specifications as per Pakistani environment, development of a voting system along with physical infrastructure for technological systems.

In a briefing to Standing Committee on Parliamentary Affairs, Secretary Election Commission voiced certain reservations on behalf of ECP. These included:

- Estimate of expenses is huge it will be around PKR 258 billion
- There was a risk of hacking
- There should be a broad based consensus among all stakeholders

ECP has shown interest in piloting EVMs in any local bodies' election, but found it difficult to implement, saying especially the

procurement of machines in the short window of time available was a major hurdle. On other hand, the Ministry of Science and Technology also made it clear that EVM could not be used in all LB polls, saying that neither the locally made EVMs nor those available globally were suited to the type of local government elections in Pakistan.

It seems difficult to implement electronic voting machines in time for general elections 2023 when we discuss with concerned ECP officials. Besides a massive budget allocation, we need trained staff for every polling station whose estimated number is around 200,000. Then there is the need to pilot EVMs on a smaller scale before the general election, which requires both time and resources says an ECP official.

However, now that the parliament has passed this legislation, the ECP is bound to implement it. The only other option for them is to approach the apex court to seek more time for its implementation. Otherwise, without complete preparations use of EVMs could be a big mess.



The Quartet Rising

On display at Beijing Olympics - besides games and sports - will be the converging interests of China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran

By Naveed Miraj

Set to commence 4 February 2022, Beijing Winter Olympics are being seen by many as a much more than a mega sporting event following its diplomatic boycott by the United States and some other western countries. The winter games have brought to the fore the frosty nature of relations between China and those in the US camp.

The diplomatic boycott of the games over the alleged Chinese human rights abuses against Uighurs and other Turkic Muslims in Xinjiang Province is nothing but a devious political tactic on the part of the Western powers green about the gills over China's rise as the world's top economic and military power.

Most other countries including Muslim countries like Pakistan do not accept the western version of what is happening in Xinjiang. In fact, many say those pointing fingers at China must see their own human rights record, and that their deafening silence over gross human rights violations at the hands of occupying forces in Palestine and Kashmir is enough to expose their duplicity.

People around the world are now compelled to ask the US and the Western countries to shun the double standard or stop lecturing others on human rights.

Anyway, the diplomatic boycott by some countries cannot undermine the Winter Olympics as an opportunity for China to showcase the progress and development it has made over the decades through par excellence arrangements made for different gaming events.

However, the event is not just an occasion for the athletes to bask in the global spotlight. Also beamed to audiences worldwide from the opening ceremony will be images of leaders like Russian President Vladimir Putin and Prime Minister Imran Khan, sending a powerful message of shifting of alliances or new alliances in the offing.

China and Russia have often collaborated in an attempt to balance against Quad. Beijing and Moscow have a shared view of the Quad - comprising the US, India, Japan, and Australia - as an arrangement to contain and isolate them. Hence, both are closely working together to safeguard their interests and counter the moves of the opposing camp.

Separately, both the countries are also engaged in deepening their relations with the regional countries. The all-weather strategic relationship between Pakistan and China has now morphed into a strategic economic partnership ever since the launch of multi-billion-dollar China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project.

China has already invested billions of dollars in Pakistan for the development of state of the art road infrastructure projects and power plants and now it is helping Pakistan to build a strong industrial base through Special Economic Zones (SEZs).



Russia and Pakistan also appear to have buried their Cold War era hostilities. Being the victim of Washington's policies, the recent engagement between them especially the military level drills, provision of military helicopters to Pakistan, and cooperation on laying of North-South Pipeline clearly indicate the warming of ties.

In a recent telephonic conversation, Prime Minister Imran and Russian President Vladimir Putin agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in different areas including high level exchanges and to remain in close contact on matters pertaining to Afghanistan. Their meeting on the sidelines of Beijing Olympics will be an important one to give a new direction to their relationship.

It is really heartening to see that Pakistan is no longer putting all its eggs in one basket but is rather aiming to diversify its relationship with proximate powers that matter.

On the other hand, Iran already has very strong relations with Russia. Recently, Tehran and Beijing also launched a 25-year strategic pact under which the Chinese side will be making a massive USD 400 billion investment in different sectors of Iran. The initiative is aimed at furthering the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to improve connectivity and economic linkages.

This multifaceted collaboration amongst the regional countries clearly suggests that a new bloc comprising China, Russia, Pakistan, and Iran is very much on the horizon if it does not already exist.

The interaction of Prime Minister Imran Khan with Chinese President Xi Jinping and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Beijing will go a long way towards building such a beneficial partnership to the advantage of the people of this region.

It is also advisable for the US to accept the reality of a multi-polar world. Instead of containing the rise and development of other nations, especially China, it must work with them in order to address serious challenges facing humanity such as that of climate change and Covid-19 pandemic.

Sporting events are by definition meant to bring nations together and by boycotting Beijing Winter Olympics, the US-led Western bloc has embarked on an adventure that is abhorrent to the very spirit of Olympics.

Parsing Pakistan's New-Fangled National Security Policy

Does the NSP really represent a break from the traditional unstructured approach to national security – or is it an attempt to institutionalise it?



By Arsim Tariq

On 14 January 2022, Pakistan's Prime Minister Imran Khan released a public version of the National Security Policy (NSP) document, which 'comprehensively' outlines Pakistan's national security objectives for the next five years. The Imran Khan-led administration is hailing it as the first such policy framework with parameters for accomplishing established national security ambitions. Prior to the public release of the NSP, the original and classified edition was authorised by the federal cabinet on 28 December 2021.

The National Security Division (NSD) drafted the policy following seven years of consultation with key official stakeholders. The document is intended to last five years, beginning in 2022, and is to be amended by NSD in the event of exceptional circumstances affecting Pakistan's security. Additionally, it can be updated whenever the country's administration changes.

For a long time, scholars and policymakers debated whether the country lacked a comprehensive national security policy. Historical policy moves – from joining the US bloc following the Cold War to supporting the anti-Soviet war in Afghanistan and later joining in the US-led War on Terror in Afghanistan – were seen as reactive.

The NSP is an attempt to unify traditional and non-traditional policy strands in order to provide overall direction. It prioritises economic security as the most significant element. Imran Khan stated during the document's launch that a country that does not have a stable economy cannot be termed safe.

The NSP separates traditional security – defined solely on the basis of defence, sovereignty, and diplomacy – from non-traditional security, which adopts a systematic view of security and incorporates human security and citizen well-being.

"Appreciating this symbiotic relationship between economic, traditional, and human security allows the articulation of holistic policy actions that will prepare Pakistan to optimise national security outcomes in the coming decades," reads the executive summary.

National cohesion

The NSP's stated objective is to advance national cohesion through "education, cultural institutions, and an inclusive national discourse."

The second section of the NSP envisions the national security policy. It prioritises

the safety and dignity of citizens. Pakistan's sovereignty is to be safeguarded through "ensuring national cohesion and harmony, preserving territorial integrity, enhancing economic independence, and ensuring the state's writ."

The section starts by emphasising "unity in diversity" of religion, race, and socioeconomic status, then swiftly moves to highlighting the "divisive discourse" exacerbated by "external forces" without identifying them. Contextual analysis, however, suggest the document's "external forces" are certainly Pakistan's neighbours.

Foreign Minister Shah Mehmood Qureshi has previously criticised Indian and Afghan intelligence agencies for causing unrest in Pakistan, while the National Security Advisor Dr Moeed Yusuf has constantly referred to a 15-year disinformation campaign targeting the European Union and the United Nations in order to advance Indian aspirations and spread false news about Pakistan.

Furthermore, according to the NSP, Pakistan's national security faces three problems. These are mainly economic challenges. This is where the manifesto appears to have widened its focus, looking

beyond Pakistan's "eternal enemy" – India.

External imbalance, vertical inequalities, and horizontal inequalities are the three issues mentioned in the document. Addressing the external imbalance of increasing foreign exchange outflow is viewed as critical for long-term viability. Vertical inequality, as evidenced by the disparity between rich and poor in Pakistan, needs to be tackled directly through assistance to disadvantaged and underprivileged populations.

The gap in economic growth between areas is viewed as a serious worry. Horizontal inequalities and regional desires are to be addressed via development packages.

The NSP emphasises the importance of encouraging "patriotism and social cohesion through national values and ethnic, religious, cultural and linguistic diversity." Although the text does not provide technicalities specifically, these are loaded terms, especially when rights groups, dissidents and political parties in opposition are frequently portrayed as "external forces" seeking to destabilise Pakistan.

Economic stability

Underscoring the need for a paradigm shift towards economic security through regional cooperation and inclusive growth, the policy attempts to address the long-standing outflow of foreign exchange in excess of inflow through a "dedicated focus" on export-oriented foreign direct investments and remittances.

The same part promotes "equitable economic development" as a means of resolving socioeconomic inequality through established welfare programs such as Ehsaas, a cash assistance facility; and Panah Gah, a shelter program. Finally, it strives to eliminate gaps in economic growth between the country's different regions.

The NSP notes that many current jobs may become obsolete within the next three decades and emphasises the importance of high-tech job development, investment in startups, and public-private collaborations.

Moreover, to compensate for the low output caused by the energy crisis, the

program recommends growing the renewable energy pool by 30 percent by year 2030 – four years after the current's policy's expiration.

Foreign policy

Economic interests will once again take precedence above regional connectivity in order to reorient the country's foreign policy. Prosperity is related to the development of markets in Eurasia and Africa, with the goal of transforming Pakistan's image abroad from that of a security-focused state to that of an economic powerhouse.

Pakistan's assistance to Afghanistan as a potential doorway to economic cooperation with Central Asian republics is acknowledged in the text, along with Pakistan's belief that the CPEC will propel its economy forward and eliminate inequality.

The approach aims to strengthen connections with India while criticising Prime Minister Narendra Modi's antagonistic policies. On Jammu and Kashmir, it maintains a "steadfast" commitment to sustained moral, diplomatic, political, and legal support to Kashmiris until they achieve self-determination. It asserts that resolving the Kashmir conflict is of "critical national security interest."

Intriguingly, it contends that Islamabad will avoid "camp politics" while seeking harmonisation in trade, investment, energy, security, and intelligence cooperation.

Military security

Fencing the Afghanistan-Pakistan border and bolstering defence along the Line of Control (LoC) with India in Kashmir are prioritised in the policy.

It places a premium on Pakistan's naval capability development. It enlarges the concrete domains of national security by emphasising the importance of counter-propaganda against the country in the digital world.

Terrorism is the primary source of concern for domestic security. While the NSP recognises economic imbalance as a contributing factor to militancy in war zones, it considers subnational groups as backed by foreign intelligence services.

Commentary

As a document on its own, the public part of NSP is quite good. Unfortunately, however, that is precisely what it appears to be: A document standing on its own, with no linkages to the wider, real-world workings of the government and no clear and concrete implementation procedures.

For instance, it talks about inclusiveness and cohesion, which is rather rich coming from a government intent on imposing a top-down Single National Curriculum, which places a premium on religious material above inclusiveness, on the diverse federation that Pakistan is.

Also, the document is evasive in discussing critical issues of security. For instance, it makes no recommendations for reversing the country's religious radicalism. In fact, it seeks to bolster Pakistan's credential as an Islamic state.

The question is, can preserving Islam's character and promoting interfaith harmony truly benefit Pakistan if the state is unwilling to liberate its people from nationalism's restrictive ideological paradigm?

There is no denying that the emergence of violent religious extremism poses a significant threat to the country's security, which is why the policy promising "action against those producing and disseminating hate speech and material will be swift and uncompromising" is in good faith.

The NSP's emphasis on high-tech job development, startup incubation, and renewable energy are all examples of wishful thinking divorced from the government's own policies.

We all know how, as a result of the government's recent economic policies, laptop prices have increased, putting more pressure on the startup sector; and the government has prohibited the use of cryptocurrency and increased duties and taxes on solar panels.

One can only hope that the parts of the policy the government has kept secret plugs some of the procedural gaps for achieving the policy's stated objectives. Why a national policy would be kept secret from the public, however, is another major question that needs answering.

The Proliferation of the Armed Drone

Is the balance of power tilting towards the tech-savvy ideological militants fighting great military powers?



By Umer Farooq

The same technological trends that made microcomputers universally available and affordable over the past few decades are now set to change the world once more - this time by putting in the hands of ragtag militias the hitech weaponry that was the exclusive preserve of superpowers only a few years ago. One such weapon is the armed drone.

For the people around the world, the drone strike in the secure and comfortable environment of shopping heaven Abu Dhabi on 18 January 2022 made startling news. More startling was the fact that it was launched by Houthi rebels based in Yemen — a country in the news more often for its starving population than for any development in military technology.

The suspected drone attack killed three people in a fuel tank blast in Abu Dhabi on Monday, officials said, as Yemen's Houthi rebels announced a "military operation" in the United Arab Emirates. Two Indians and a Pakistani died as three petrol tanks exploded near the storage facility of oil giant ADNOC, while a fire also ignited in a construction area at Abu Dhabi airport.

The event will be remembered as an indicator of easy availability of military technology to whoever is ready to pay the cash. But this will also be remembered as an indicator of expansion of a sectarian conflict into the heart of one of the financial hubs of the world.

Iran backed Houthi rebels of Yemen had been at the receiving end of a military campaign by an alliance of orthodox Sunni states of the Gulf including Saudi Arabia and United Arab Emirates (UAE). Iranians provide financing, weapons, training, and political motivation to the Houthi rebels. This apparently seems like an inter-state conflict. But this network of conflicts has a sectarian nature at the very basic level.

Adding complexity to this situation is the offer made by the state of Israel to UAE to assist the Arab Sheikhdom in providing help in intelligence and technology provision to counter any future drone strike in UAE.

The UAE has only recently extended diplomatic recognition to Israel. There is a sectarian dimension to the issue of award-

ing recognition to Zionist state of Israel: All the Middle East countries that recognised Israel or are advocating the recognition of Israeli state are Orthodox Sunni states.

While Iran—the only regional power steadfastly opposed to establishing any kind of diplomatic relations with Israel—is an orthodox Shia state. Unsurprisingly, all the non-state actors politically opposed to extending recognition to Israel or militarily fighting the Israeli state adhere to orthodox Shia faith. This includes as an example of first type the Shia population of the tiny Gulf sheikhdom of Bahrain and as an example of second type the Hezbollah Militia of Lebanon.

Above described political scenario is not simply a neat description of picture of diplomatic division in the Arab world over the question of recognising or not recognising Israel—rather this scenario involves a waging of a ferocious sectarian civil war in Arab world, with financially powerful backers providing financial and military assistance to their co-religionists in the active fighting in countries including Syria, Yemen, and Iraq.

This civil war has the potential to spread to countries including Bahrain, where a Sunni dynasty is ruling over a Shia population and which has only recently extended diplomatic recognition to Israel. This sectarian civil war can extend to countries with relatively calmer social and political conditions and strong and stable states.

The civil war obviously is not about the question of extending diplomatic recognition to Israel but certainly the issue of conservative Arab sheikhdoms opening up diplomatic relations with Israel will cause further tensions in the already tense sectarian relations in Arab societies, with so neat a division on the question between Sunni states, which awarded recognition and Shia state and non-state actors which are opposed to Muslim world extending recognition to Israel.

The complex nature of the battle lines that are being drawn in the Arab world makes it amply clear all these inter-state and intra-state conflicts in the Arab world are linked together and are sectarian in nature. So from the perspective of international politics of the Muslim world, these are probably the most disturbing and sinister developments in international security situation.

The ambitions of regional powers are fueling these conflicts. Saudi Arabia wants to remain a prominent power of the Muslim World. Iranians want to preserve their influence in Syria and Lebanon—the two countries along with Iraq providing Iran's clerical establishment with what has been dubbed by experts as a "Shia corridor" to the Mediterranean Ocean.

This divide in the Muslim world apparently should not have been much of the concern for the superpowers. However, as the Syrian civil war has made amply clear, these networks of conflicts could drag military giants like the United States and Russia into the war on the opposing side of the conflict.

These military powers not only provided weapons and professional advice to the opposing sides in Syrian conflicts their military forces participated in the actual conflict.

There are two other conflicts in international politics that can bring about a faceoff

between the superpowers. Firstly, there is the possibility and potential of a conflict over Taiwan. China considers Taiwan as a province and would not tolerate its independence under any circumstances. On the other hand, there are strong lobbies in Washington advocating full military participation of the United States if China makes a move to grab the island.

Both Americans and Chinese, however, are busy elsewhere for now. And Taiwan is a huge economic success story unlike the miseries that are on full display in the Muslim world. Both Chinese and Americans will have to think twice before ruining this economic success story with military adventurism.



The Group of Seven (G7) wealthiest liberal democracies in the middle of December 2021 issued dual warnings to Russia over the almost universal fear of Russian attack on Ukraine. G7 foreign ministers meeting in Liverpool, England, warned Russia about consequences of invading Ukraine.

The political unity of Liberal democracies, which took its present form during the Cold War against the Soviet Union, might prove to be a phenomenon which is fading away. Liberal democracies nowadays agree on few things and disagree on many. The mistrust between them runs high with each taking pains to project itself as a distinct political entity instead of a united bloc that acts in unity on the world stage.

Americans are extremely wary of military

commitment in a far off land especially after Iraq and Afghanistan left a bitter taste in their mouth, while Europeans are still vulnerable to Russian blackmail on supply of energy to western and central Europe which makes the affluent middle class life of these societies possible.

The chance of Ukraine becoming a conflict-zone, between military superpowers is therefore negligible, although tough diplomatic wrangling is expected.

The trophy for hosting the bleakest possibility of a horrendous military conflict, however, goes to South Asia—Pakistan and India are not only on a dangerous military path, they could with their brinkmanship bring about a nuclear winter to the planet.

When President Obama called the then Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to dissuade him from mobilising his military in the wake of the Mumbai attacks, he did not warn him how the Indian economy will go into recession because of any conflict between two nuclear rivals. He told him straight that the world economy will go into recession because of a prolonged Pakistan and India military conflict.

Besides nuclear scientists around the world are in consensus that in case of a nuclear exchange between two countries, no life will be possible in this part of the world for the next 50 years. Peaceful co-existence is the only option available to the two countries.

The Anatomy of Afghanistan's Grim Human Catastrophe

Caught between an unmovable Kabul and an irresistible Washington, the people of Afghanistan are gripped by untold catastrophe



By Haq Nawaz Khan

With the country's economy in tatters and a harsh winter of want wreaking havoc on the populace, Afghanistan's Taliban rulers show no signs of mending their ways concerning human rights, women's rights, or plurality of opinion.

Nevertheless, they are ramping up their efforts to seek diplomatic recognition for their government. The latest call to that end came from Mullah Hasan Akhund, the interim prime minister of the self-styled Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan.

In his first public remarks since being named the head of Taliban's interim government, Akhund called on the world to recognise the Taliban government. "I am not asking for money for myself or my ministers or officials", he said, "but for the millions of Afghans, who have been suffering the most".

Meanwhile, the human catastrophe playing out in the country ravaged by decades of war is escalating by the hour. United Nations General Secretary António

Guterres has spurred the global leadership to action, asserting "virtually every man, woman and child in Afghanistan could face acute poverty" without a more concerted effort from the international community.

In the second week of January, the United Nations launched its largest-ever humanitarian appeal for a single country, requiring more than USD 5 billion in assistance this year. Speaking to journalists in New York, Guterres said the scale of the appeal reflected the scale of the despair.

Reports filtering out of the country speak of malnourished mothers birthing premature babies and children being sold to feed the rest of their family members. Freezing health facilities are overflowing with malnourished children and people are burning their possessions to keep warm as livelihoods have been lost across the country.

The global community is adamant the Taliban government will not be recognised unless it take practical steps to improve human rights situation in the country. But reports from within and outside of the

country are suggest the Taliban could not care less.

No movement is in the offing towards a broad-based government, to restore women's rights, or to tolerate a plurality of opinions. Some Taliban leaders have made some appropriate noises but reports coming out of the country belie their claims.

On the contrary, they seemed to have intensified their campaign to persecute rights defenders, especially women activists. Most native human rights activists have either left Afghanistan since it fell to the Taliban or are living in the environment of fear and uncertainty.

In mid-January, Taliban fighters detained two prominent women activists after they participated in a protest in Kabul against recent Taliban abuses of women protesters and other restrictions on women. Tamana Zaryabi Paryani and his sisters were taken by armed men the night following the protest. Also detained in similar circumstances was another woman activist Parawana Ibrahimkhel.

The move has attracted strong rebuke from human rights defenders from around the world, but the Taliban have denied taking them.

According to Human Rights Watch: “Witnesses said that on the night of January 19, armed men claiming to be Taliban intelligence broke through the door of Paryani’s home and took her away, along with three of her sisters. Paryani posted a video on social media of the moment before the men broke into her house. Ibrahimkhel was similarly abducted from her home and her whereabouts remain unknown.”

The human rights body said Taliban denials of the arrests were undermined on January 23 when Taliban spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid said the Taliban had the right “to arrest and detain dissidents.”

In a breakthrough of sorts, Norway took the lead to invite the Taliban for discussions, becoming the first western country last week to host Taliban since they stormed to power in Kabul.

However, the Norwegian Foreign Minister Anniken Huitfeldt stressed that the talks would “not represent a legitimisation or recognition of the Taliban. But we must talk to the de facto authorities in the country. We cannot allow the political situation to lead to an even worse humanitarian disaster.”

A major challenge facing the Taliban leadership is the lack of discipline in the militia’s ranks. Local commanders and foot soldiers have been allegedly involved in gross misconduct, and violations of general amnesty declared by the supreme leader Sheikh Haibatullah Akhonzada for the members of the former government.

In a recent meeting with the security forces, the acting Interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani alias Khalifa has asked the police and security forces to respect the general amnesty, and avoid personal revenge and enmity.

“I understand, this is a difficult task to provide security to those who have killed and disrespected our family members in the past, but we have to show extreme patience and tolerance” he said. “We fought in the path of Allah, and we have to expect the rewards from Him.”

The Taliban leadership also claims such acts could be the work of some “miscreants” who have infiltrated their ranks. “We are going to expel bad people who are found guilty in any unlawful activities,” acting Taliban foreign minister Mawlawi Amir Khan Muttaqi was quoted as saying in a media report.

Freedom of speech is also either restricted or banned. Many journalists have been beaten, harassed and killed. In some of the incidents, the Taliban officials have initiated investigations but no results as what happened at the end. Many journalists had left the country, fearing life threats and backlash.



Against this backdrop, efforts have been geared up by the Taliban to convince the world that its government has the authority to be accepted to end the miseries of the Afghan people. In mid-January, the Taliban has organised an international conference on the Afghanistan economy.

Acting Prime Minister asked the world, particularly the Muslim countries to recognise the Taliban government to end the ongoing humanitarian crisis. However, he welcomed the world for providing humanitarian assistance.

“Short-term assistance is not a permanent solution. We need to find ways to resolve fundamental issues,” he argued.

Speaking at a recent International conference on the Afghanistan economy, acting Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Salam Hanafi said, “We are fully committed to

supporting the humanitarian assistance of the UN and other donor organisations. We assure full security, access, flexible policies, and enabled environment for donor community in continuing their humanitarian assistance.”

At the same time, we ask for the equitable, transparent, and efficient distribution of the humanitarian assistance. Afghanistan will continue to need development assistance after overcoming the current problems.

“Unfortunately, the USD 9.5 billion in offshore financial reserves of the Afghanistan has also been frozen and formal and informal economic sanctions have been imposed as well which consequently impacted the life and livelihood of the Afghan people”, he mentioned.

The UN chief seemed to at least partly agree with this point of view when he said, “Freezing temperatures and frozen assets are a lethal combination for the people of Afghanistan”. He also pointed to rules and conditions preventing money from being used to save lives and the economy, arguing they should be suspended.

“International funding should be allowed to pay the salaries of public-sector workers, and to help Afghan institutions deliver healthcare, education and other vital services”, he said.

In December 2021, the US Treasury Department’s Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) granted some licenses to aid groups to operate in Afghanistan without running afoul of financial restrictions on other individuals and institutions in the country. But experts say it is not enough to bring any appreciable relief to the people of Afghanistan.

Also in December, more than 40 members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus sent a letter to President Joe Biden, urging him to release the frozen currency reserves of the Central Bank of Afghanistan. So far, however, no policy shift has been forthcoming in Washington DC.

The people of Afghanistan are thus being squeezed, caught between two egotistic regimes, none of whom seems ready to cede ground, unmoved by the world’s largest humanitarian crisis.

Pakistan is the Top Recipient of US Global Vaccine Deliveries

Delivery of 42.6 million vaccine vials is a reflection of strong Pak-US ties, says the Chargé d'affaires



By Zarghon Shah

That Pakistan's fight against the Covid-19 global pandemic has met better success than some neighbouring countries is owing, among other factors, to the comparatively swift rollout achieved by the country. This was made possible in part by generous vaccine donations from friendly countries including the United States.

A top US diplomat stationed at Islamabad has now told The Truth International (TTI) in an exclusive interview Pakistan has received the largest share of vaccine donations from US. Chargé d'affaires a.i. of the Embassy of the United States in Islamabad, Angela Aggeler said Covid shots shipped to Pakistan account for 12 percent of the global US vaccine donations.

Apart from Covid cooperation, the wide-ranging interview covered Pak-US educational and commercial ties and US help for Pakistani entrepreneurs and professionals. Given below is an abridged transcript of the interview.

TTI: What has the United States done to help the world fight Covid?

AA: Covid is not a problem of any one country or region. It is necessary to take steps at the global level to deal with it. We have taken steps to ensure the supply of the coronavirus vaccines worldwide through COVAX and other platforms. Omicron shows how this epidemic continues, we have helped different countries not only in the world but also at the regional level.

Although the United States has so far supplied 350 million doses worldwide through COVAX and other partners, the epidemic is still spreading and we are seeing an increase in the number of coronavirus cases in many countries. These countries include the United States and Pakistan.

TTI: What is the situation of Omicron in the US?

AA: In the US and Pakistan, we are seeing that people who take two full doses and one

booster shot are also falling prey to this highly contagious virus and are affecting other. In dealing with the Covid challenge, Pakistan has been America's best partner.

TTI: How has the US government supported the government of Pakistan's response to the Covid-19 outbreak?

AA: We have given 42.6 million doses to Pakistan, most of which include Pfizer and some Moderna vaccines, which account for 12 percent of US vaccine deliveries worldwide and this reflects the strong Pak-US relationship. US and Pakistan have been working for decades to improve health infrastructure in Pakistan.

When Covid struck, Pakistan already had health infrastructure in place. We first trained additional medical staff, ensured provision of mobile laboratories, and we donated 200 ventilators to Pakistan.

TTI: The US donated quite a few vaccines to Pakistan. Can you share more details?

AA: The fact that Pakistan receives 12% of the US vaccines given to 110 countries around the world is a proof that Pakistan has made the best and most efficient use of US doses – delivering it to those in need. And it reflects the efficiency and success of the health infrastructure.

That is why Pakistan has not been more affected by the Covid than other neighbouring countries, but much remains to be done. Pakistan is expected to receive a few million more US doses by the end of this month.

TTI: What other significant health assistance has the United States provided Pakistan?

AA: We have been working with Pakistan for decades to provide health infrastructure to the people of Pakistan. Our efforts include the creation of National Institutes of Health and its facilities and the establishment of laboratories across the country, where tests can be conducted and through which contacts with populations can be established.

These laboratories provide fast services in case of any health emergency. Due to availability of these medical facilities, Pakistan has been able to deal with Covid in a timely manner. Training medical staff, and raising awareness about any medical issues, is part of our effort. And now we are cooperating in setting up a Centre for Disease Control and Prevention in Pakistan.

It is also a fact that a large number of people from Pakistan went to America where they studied medicine, and these people brought their training and skills back to Pakistan. These people include Dr Faisal Sultan, and I am proud of him.

There are currently 8,000 Pakistanis studying in the United States who are involved in the medical field, and many are also trained medical doctors. We are training Pakistani medical personnel through various USAID programs at provincial level.

We have provided three mobile laboratories in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. About 85000 Pakistanis received medical aid through these laboratories during the epidemic. Not

only are Pakistanis going to the US and bringing back their education and skills, we are also training health professionals here to increase their capacity.

TTI: How do you rate Pakistanis as a people in following Covid SOPs?

AA: We can all do better in this regard, but I would say again that we should look at the steps that Pakistan has taken. I would commend the government of Pakistan for taking some tough decisions and adopting a tough policy to keep its people safe.

We can take even better steps in the United States, because our vaccination rates are not as high as they should be. We can improve ourselves further, and for this we have to take some drastic measures, for example, if you want to go to the cinema, you must be vaccinated.



TTI: Is the United States doing anything to support Pakistan's fight against climate change?

AA: Pakistan is highly vulnerable to climate change, and the US and Pakistan have a decades-old partnership in this regard. The United States has been working with Pakistan for decades on the issue of clean energy, including the supply of around 4,000mw of electricity, valued at PKR 400 million in Pakistan.

TTI: How is United States mission in Pakistan supporting local entrepreneurs?

AA: Pakistan is facing some real economic challenges, but the Pakistani youth is one of the most important resources for the country. Pakistan has committed young population which is a great workforce.

We provide platforms for Pakistani entrepreneurs to facilitate networking and company formation, hold important events for them where they can share their ideas. We are focused on women entrepreneurs. We make sure that women benefit from our assistance.

The English language is very important in this regard and we have organized many programs related to English language courses. Thousands of Pakistanis have benefited from these programs. We will definitely help deserving and creative Pakistani entrepreneurs who can improve their country's economy.

TTI: How is the US currently helping Pakistan in the higher education sector?

AA: Despite Covid, hundreds of Pakistanis are benefiting from our professional and

educational exchange program in the United States. Our educational programs include high school, university and vocational education; and young people are benefiting from these programs and changing their lives.

This educational cooperation is very beneficial for Pakistan, because when these people come back, they will benefit their country. For Pakistan, our Fulbright Scholarship program is the largest in the world. Our alumni program is also the largest.

All of this is not only good for Pakistan's education system, but when these people go to the United States, they are Pakistan's ambassadors there, and they help us too.

The Battle for Ukraine

Will the NATO-Russia tussle over Ukraine devolve into full-scale war or will better sense prevail?



By Dr Khalid Bajwa

The massing of Russian troops on the Ukrainian border has come as a rude awakening to the Western capitals. All eyes are now set on the evolving situation, which if we go by the rhetoric of the world leaders and media, is deteriorating fast.

Russia is doing military exercises on the Ukrainian border and more than 100,000 troops along with heavy armour and tanks are participating. The United States and its allies fear that Russia can invade Ukraine anytime, contravening international laws and violating sovereignty of an independent nation.

Russia, on the other hand, denies that it is going to invade Ukraine. It states that its troops are on its own side of the border and that Russia has every right to move around its troops on its soil and no one has a right to object.

The Western world led by the US, on the other hand, believes a Russian invasion is imminent. Their analysis is tinged by the Russian invasion and subsequent annexation of Crimea and the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia.

To counter such an invasion, the US is not only sending arms and ammunition to Ukraine but has also put thousands of troops on alert in case Russia invades.

NATO is bolstering its combat readiness. However, it is far from clear how the US and other NATO nations are actually going to respond.

To understand real problem, one has to filter out the noise and see what the problem is and why Russia and the Western bloc are upping the stakes. Only then can we surface the core problem and unearth the real bone of contention.

To understand the Russian perspective, one can refer to the Russian president's essay which he penned down in July 2021 for Foreign affairs, in which he described Russian and Ukrainian people as 'one people' with 'same historical and spiritual space'.

The Ukrainian capital, Kyiv, is considered as the mother city of Russian cities just like St Petersburg and Moscow. This just reflects the sensitivity and sentimentality of Russians regarding Ukraine. Christianity was also introduced in Russia through Ukraine.

Ukraine was the second largest soviet republic after Russia in terms of Population. Not only was it the food basket and the industrial complex of the Soviet Union, it hosted nuclear missile silos as well as the powerful Russian Black Sea Fleet.

Russia sees Ukraine as part and parcel of Russia, even if not as a part of Russia, then certainly as closely aligned with Russian interests and influence. This Russian sentiment is not congruent with the fact that Ukraine is an independent sovereign country.

Russians are worried about NATO's post-Cold War enlargement, which saw the bloc absorb the some former Soviet republics in the Baltic region. Since the end of the Cold War, NATO's membership has been increasing around Russian borders making Moscow uncomfortable. The prospective NATO membership of Ukraine is a red line for Russia and it insists that Ukraine will never become member of NATO.

The US under president Trump was not very keen on NATO. It considered NATO as a financial burden and conveyed to European capitals that Europe's defence was Europe's responsibility. However, under President Biden, the US has been more active internationally, and engaging with allies and wherever it sees an opportunity to protect and propagate its interests.

Ukraine is one such country where the US is engaged most. This American interest and Ukraine's intent to join EU and NATO made Moscow nervous, hence the various manoeuvres including the present military

build-up on the Ukrainian border. Moscow intent on demonstrating Ukraine is a red line.

The Russian Black Sea Fleet based in Crimean port of Sevastopol is an important Russian strategic asset and Russia sees it as vital to increasing its influence not only in the Black Sea countries but also to Mediterranean countries as well as to North Africa and beyond.

It is also important to note that Russia has been supplying energy to EU and rest of the Europe through Ukraine and paying billions of dollars to Ukraine in transit fees. The completion of Nord Stream 2 pipeline under the Baltic Sea has almost eliminated Russian's reliance on Ukraine for transporting its energy supplies to Europe. This might have also encouraged Russia to up the ante.

The US was against building of this pipeline fearing that Ukraine will be hit hard by losing transit fee. However, the EU did not agree with the US and the pipeline was completed. The US has been working with Germany and other allies to work out modalities that can mitigate the loss of Ukraine.

The US has important and vital interests in the region and Ukraine. How important? In the words of American former National Security Advisor, Zbigniew Brzezinski, 'it cannot be stressed strongly enough that without Ukraine, Russia ceases to be an empire, with Ukraine suborned and then subordinated, Russia automatically becomes an empire'.

That essentially brings Ukraine to the main stage of the Washington's Russian containment policy. The Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 worried the US and its allies about the sovereignty of Ukraine and loss of their interests. Putin has declared that it will never let Ukraine to be Anti-Russia. The lines are drawn and each side is trying to protect its own.

The US and its allies are committed to protecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and rightly so as no country should be allowed to violate the territorial integrity of a sovereign nation, by dint of sheer force. By doing so, they will also be protecting and furthering their interests, which is again the right of every country. If they succeed in bringing

Ukraine in their fold, that will mark a big strategic victory for them.

The US also sees this conflict as an opportunity to show and reassure the world in general, and its allies in particular, that America is back in the international arena and would not leave its allies alone in the time of need. Since President Joe Biden rose to power, America is trying its best to reclaim its status as a leader of the free world by engaging in and re-joining multi-lateral agreements and arrangements.

The problem with the European Union is that though it considers Russia as a security threat, and a serious one too that needs to be tackled effectively, it is also dependent on Russian energy for continuous turning of its wheels of economy.



If the conflict escalates to war, there could be serious disruptions of energy supply, bringing to halt the recovery of European economy already reeling under Covid-19 pandemic. The fears are European economic growth may turn negative under the worsening circumstances.

Suspension of exports to EU, along with debilitating sanctions the US is threatening to impose, will cripple the Russian economy resulting in social unrest that could seriously affect the presidency of President Putin.

if indeed breaks out, the war will therefore be very costly for both the EU and Russia.

The US, on the other hand, will be least affected as it is not dependent on Russia for its energy supplies. The UK may not be as secure but its limited reliance on Russian

energy means its costs will also be limited compared to EU's.

Considering all this, it may be a ploy by president Putin to drive a wedge between the US and EU based on their conflicting economic interests. If this is the case, EU nations and the US would do well to have an excellent communication and not allow any misunderstanding to creep in among the allies. A disjointed approach to the conflict, which is already in evidence, is a serious possibility.

As for Ukraine, it has been struggling since its independence to assert itself as an independent and a sovereign country. However, impeded by its past and ambitions, it is ambivalent in choosing the direction it wants to pursue. It has so far not

been able to bridge the gap between its foreign policy goals of joining NATO and the EU with its internal ethnic conflicts.

The south east regions of Donbas are populated predominantly by people of Russian origin and they want to have a strong relationship with Russia, whereas the remaining Ukrainian speaking population wants a closer embrace with the West.

Considering the very high cost, in all forms, for all involved in the conflict and the laws of the logic, it seems unlikely that there will be a full-scale war unless, of course, madness prevails. If it does prevail, this conflict has the potential to precipitate into World War III.

In the likelier scenario, however, the conflict will continue to simmer for a long time with its highs and lows and may manifest itself in other fields than in full-blown war.

Boris Johnson's Existential Crisis

Even if he survives Partygate, the Tory prime minister will find his stature much diminished



By Shahmir Niazi

Prime Minister Boris Johnson finds himself in deep water as reports of a series of Downing Street parties, amid strict Covid lockdown, surfaced. Over the past six weeks, the conservative leader's administration has been pushed to the brink of collapse as the British public seeks answers for the violation of rules.

The issue turned particularly sensitive after Johnson's initial denial and subsequent confirmation of the bring-your-own-booze parties evoked public outrage for concealing the truth. In an embarrassing turn of events for the prime minister, it was reported soon after that one such gathering took place during a period of national mourning for the Duke of Edinburgh's death. Even though he has apologised to the Queen, the events have exacted a heavy toll on his credibility as a leader.

The latest developments suggest that a coup within his own party may be in the offing. Tory MPs have already ramped up attacks on the PM, with some submitting letters of no confidence aimed at a leadership ballot to elect a new prime minister.

In an embarrassing turn of events for the prime minister, Conservative MP for Bury South Christian Wakeford switched parties minutes before the prime minister's question hour on 19 January, claiming that the prime minister is incapable of leadership.

Another setback for Johnson came when in a dramatic development, when David Davis, a Conservative MP, read the words Leo Amery uttered when he famously addressed Prime Minister Neville Chamberlain in 1940, "You have sat too long here for any good you have been doing...In the name of God, go."

The Prime Minister, however, seems determined to cling on to power.

Whether the disgruntled Tory MPs will be successful in amassing the required threshold of 54 to trigger a leadership ballot is the million-dollar question. The body language of the prime minister suggests that it remains a farfetched goal. Since the ballot is secret, many MPs voicing concern in the public may end up voting in the favour of their party leader.

As parliament debates the prime minister's actions and the leader of opposition Keir Starmer lambasted him for breaching the public's trust and confidence – an independent inquiry on the Downing Street parties is simultaneously running.

Sue Gray, a civil servant who has largely remained hidden from the public eye throughout her career toiling in anonymity, is preparing a report on Johnson's activities. Her findings will determine Johnson's political future.

Given how he has repeatedly pleaded with his party members to wait for Gray's report, the Prime Minister seems optimistic about the ongoing investigation. But even if Johnson is acquitted, the reconstitution of his team at Downing Street cannot be ruled out.

Dan Rosenfield, his chief of staff, and principal private secretary Martin Reynolds were the ones who emailed the invitation to the bring-your-own-booze garden party. Perhaps Johnson has no choice but to let them go to appease his detractors, even though his critics may demand more in view of his lowest net favourability rating.

Senior party members including Foreign Secretary Liz Truss and Chancellor Rishi Sunak are already vying to replace Johnson as leader of the Conservative party. In a recent poll, over half of Tory MPs reposed their confidence in Sunak as having more potential to lead the party as prime minister than Johnson.

But even if Johnson survives this storm, there will be tough days ahead for him as more power shifts to the Cabinet against the backdrop of his dwindling popularity within the Conservative party. His government is already being criticised by the parliament backbenchers over the rising costs of living, imposition of fresh taxes, and harsh Covid restrictions including mask mandates and Covid passports.

Surmounting these challenges when the party is bitterly fragmented and the prime minister has an inexperienced team at 10 Downing Street is a tough ask. Gone are the days when Johnson's allies would boast that he was set to govern for a decade. Within weeks, all that has crumbled.

What is more, a cabinet preoccupied with the race to replace him as the prime minister will become even harder to lead. On this harsh terrain, Johnson will have to pull a masterstroke if he wants to dispose of legislative business. As a former cabinet minister declared: "The imperial premiership is over."

But is it really the case? Are Johnson's days indeed numbered? Can a behavioural failure at the personal level bring down a leader? Well, history suggests that the UK can tolerate major failures of foreign policy but cannot make peace with an overblown personal offense. Tony Blair's policy failure over Iraq did not bring him down – but a booze party (apparently) can. For someone who achieved a landslide victory in 2019 to have fallen so dramatically in the public eye is unprecedented.

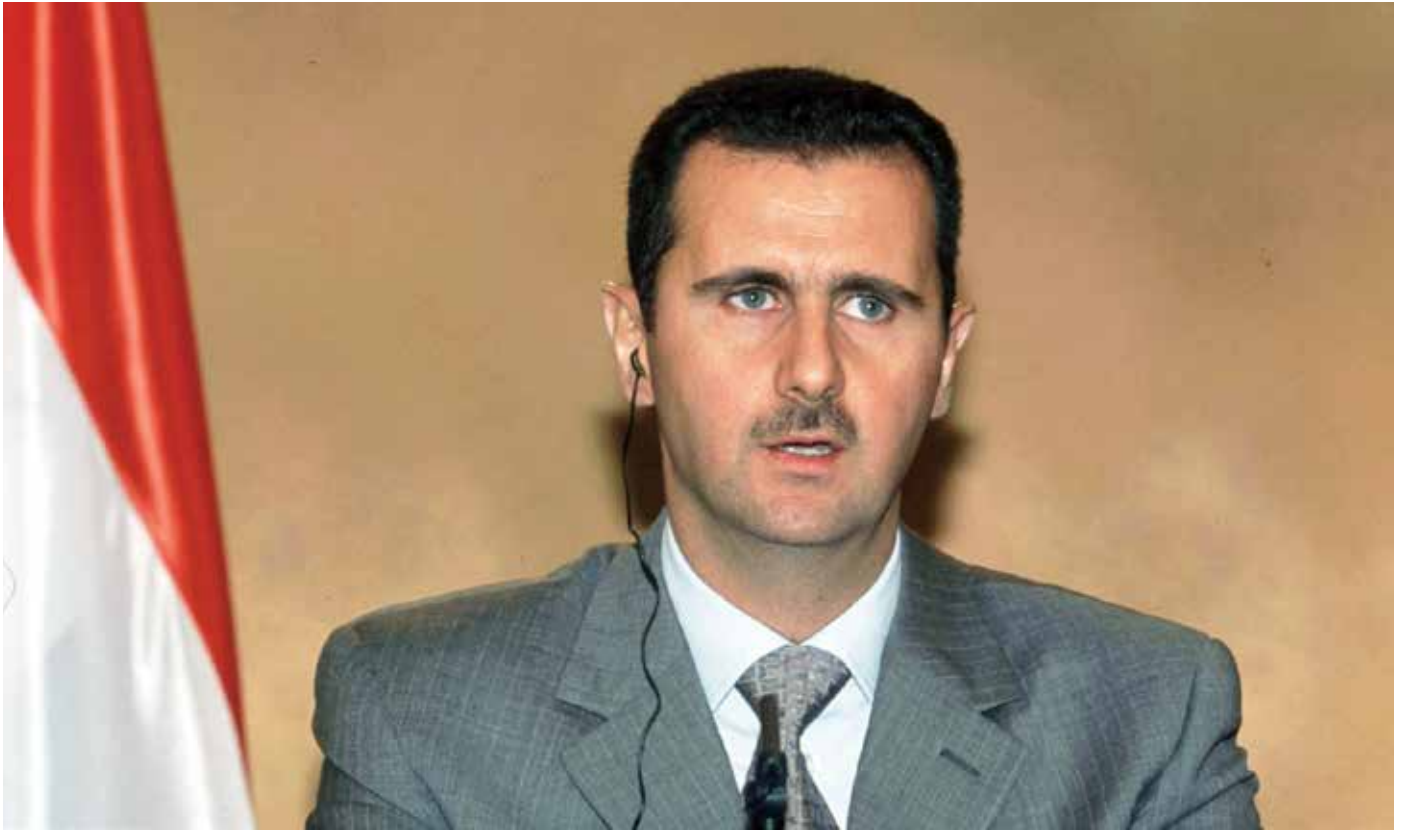
It is an unforgiving atmosphere to sail through his recently proposed reforms. The said legislation on the electoral system, criminal justice system, and the planning regime has been deemed well behind the parliamentary schedule by Nikki Da Costa, Downing Street's former director of legislative affairs.

With Johnson running out of time, MPs will now raise the price of their votes, cashing in on his desperation. Seeing a weak prime minister, the House of Lords will be further emboldened, creating more obstacles for the man who already finds himself in a full-scale political crisis – entirely of his own making.



No Safe Harbour for Perpetrators of Crimes Against Humanity

Reckoning for a henchman of Syria's repressive al-Assad regime brings hope to victims worldwide



TTI Report

The repressive regime of Syria's President Bashar al-Assad has tortured, killed, and maimed thousands of Syrians with impunity – but that began to change earlier this month when a German court put behind bars a Syrian security official for overseeing systematic mass torture and killing of political detainees.

A former colonel, Anwar Raslan, 58, had been charged with crimes against humanity in Syria's notorious Al-Khatib prison, the Damascus jail known as "Hell on Earth". Deemed by the court to have verifiably overseen the murder of at least 27 and torture of at least 4,000 prisoners under his command, he was sentenced to life in prison.

UN high commissioner for human rights Michelle Bachelet hailed the ruling as "historic", and said it should spur forward "all efforts to widen the net of accountability for all perpetrators of the

unspeakable crimes that have characterised this brutal conflict".

A United Nations report in 2019 said at least 100,000 had been detained or missing in Syria. The Syrian Network for Human Rights puts the figure at about 150,000 and estimates that nearly 15,000 people have died from torture in Syria since March 2011. Activists say the true number may be far higher.

Raslan was a high-ranking security service officer who led the regime effort to crush mass anti-government protests in 2011. Many protesters and others suspected of opposing the regime were rounded up and detained in the Al-Khatib facility in Damascus where, prosecutors say, Mr Raslan directed operations.

His landmark trial in Koblenz, Germany was the world's first criminal case brought over state-led torture in Syria. The charges

he faced included 58 murders as well as rape and sexual assault, and the torture of at least 4,000 people held there between 2011 and 2012.

Anwar Raslan was arrested in Germany in 2019 having successfully sought asylum here. He denies all the charges against him, says he had nothing to do with the mistreatment of prisoners and says he actually tried to help some detainees.

Prompted by the arrival in Germany of hundreds of thousands of Syrians who had fled their own country, his trial was unprecedented in taking on Syria's state-led torture.

Many of the almost 800,000 Syrians who now live in Germany brought with them terrible stories of what happened to those who opposed the Assad regime, and German human rights lawyers took up their cause, using the principle of universal

jurisdiction to bring the case to court. The principle allows serious crimes committed in one country to be tried elsewhere.

Wolfgang Kaleck, head of the European Centre for Constitutional and Human Rights which led the case, said it was hard to talk about justice given that hundreds of thousands of people had been tortured and tens of thousands of people had died as a result.

But perhaps most importantly the trial has given a voice to those whom the Assad regime tried to silence. Fifty survivors have given evidence to the court in Koblenz and 24 are co-plaintiffs in the case.

Their stories are horrifying. The court has heard how detainees were beaten and doused in cold water. Others were raped or hung from the ceiling for hours on end. Torturers tore out their fingernails and administered electric shocks.

One survivor was quoted by BBC as saying he could hear the screams of people being

tortured all day, every day. Another said his attackers used special “tools” and that appeared to enjoy what they were doing.

Raslan is the second former Syrian official to be convicted as part of the same trial. The first was Eyad-al-Gharib, who helped to arrest protesters who were later tortured and killed. He was jailed for four and a half years for complicity in crimes against humanity.

Bashar al-Assad and his government have repeatedly denied accusations of torturing or forcibly “disappearing” hundreds of thousands of his own citizens.

This trial is also important because it contributes to a body of evidence for use in future proceedings. In addition to witness testimonies, prosecutors in Koblenz have relied on the “Caesar files”: gruesome photographs smuggled out of Syria by a regime whistleblower which show the dead bodies of thousands of people believed to have died in detention facilities. Many of them were visibly tortured.

While the verdict brings closure to some of the survivors of the highhandedness of the Syrian state, many more continue to await justice or have despaired of it.

There are many stories that have not been heard, says Wassim Mukdad, who was first detained in Syria in 2011 and now lives in Germany: “Either because they are still detained now - while we’re talking, they’re suffering torture and horrible situations in the detention centres. Or because they were murdered.”

And then, he adds, there were those who died as they tried to reach Europe, drowning at sea or freezing on Europe’s borders.

The real significance of the verdict is that it strengthens case law for trial of more and more perpetrators of crimes against humanity under the principle of universal jurisdiction. Activists hope it marks the beginning of the end of impunity for unscrupulous officials in thrall of tyrannical regimes.





Pakistan's Top Cricketing Festival Sets Winter Sizzling

With PSL7 underway, cricket fans around the world are in for a month of top-notch cricket

Desk Report

Against all odds, the saga of Pakistan Super League continues as it had begun seven years ago: A running testament to Pakistanis' resilience, grit, and love of cricket.

Back in the day, Pakistani cricket authorities had to find innovative ways to work around the terrorist threat to stage the early editions of PSL. This time around, the enemy is a fresh wave of the Covid-19 global pandemic driven by the Omicron variant that has hit Karachi, the city hosting the first leg of the league, particularly hard.

But Pakistan did not relent then and is not relenting now. The seventh edition of Pakistan's top cricketing festival – officially HBL Pakistan Super League 2022 – is going ahead in grand style, albeit with an added layer of safety protocols to guard against the spread of the bug.

Opening

The opening ceremony of Pakistan's favourite cricketing festival took place on 27th January with great fanfare at Karachi's National Stadium. The event got underway with the screening of a documentary

shedding light tracing the journey of cricket in Pakistan.

Another highlight of the event was a special message from Prime Minister Imran Khan – himself a former cricket hero – to PSL teams played on the big screen. Former English footballer Micheal Owen, who is currently visiting Pakistan, was also present at the ceremony.

Singers Atif Aslam and Aima Baig feted the audience with a live performance of this edition's anthem 'Agay Dekh'. Adding colour to the ceremony were a paragliding stunt and a display of fireworks.

The formal opening was followed by the first match of PSL7 – a showdown between reigning champions Multan Sultan facing off with Karachi Kings. The Sultan outclassed by the Kings when they achieved the target of 126 runs with seven wickets to spare.

International players

Some 443 international players participated in the draft for this edition of the league – an impressive number considering how

Covid-19 has disrupted life and work in all parts of the world.

They came from cricket superpowers like England, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, and West Indies (with the exception of India) as well as from nations new to cricket like United States, Canada, Iran, Malaysia, France, and Nepal.

Playing conditions

According to the updated playing conditions set by PCB's technical committee, a match will go ahead even if 13 out of each playing side's 20-man squads are available.

In a situation where not even 13 players of a side are available, the affected team will be allowed to make up the number by picking players a reserve pool.

In case of a Covid-19 outbreak hitting the managed event environment, the tournament will be halted for seven days and bio-secure bubbles for all sides will be reset from scratch. To make up for the time lost, double-headers will be held in the remaining days to meet the 27 February deadline.



Safety protocols

In view of the fifth wave of Covid-19 raging across much of the country, Pakistan Cricket Board (PCB) has restricted spectators in Karachi, playing host to the first leg of PSL7 from 27 January to 7 February, to 25 percent capacity, following recommendations by the National Command and Operation Centre.

Covid safety guidelines for the second leg, due to take place at Lahore's Gaddafi Stadium from 10 to 27 February, are yet to be finalised.

Separately, the PCB's Medical Advisory Panel has put together a set of robust health and safety protocols to keep players, support personnel, and officials safe.

According to the official PSL website, the protocols are intended "to ensure health and safety of all participants as well as to provide them safe and secure environment to prepare, play and perform in the PCB's marquee event".

Mandatory three-day room isolation commenced on 20 January. Participants were then allowed to enter the managed event environment and integrate with their sides only following two negative tests.

In the event period from 27 January to 7 February, all participants will undergo four PCR tests. In addition to the tests upon arrival in Lahore, all participants will undergo seven PCR tests from 10-27 February.

There will be mandatory seven-day isolation for any participant who tests positive. On day seven, the participant will undergo a Rapid Antigen Test and will be allowed to re-integrate with the side if he tests negative.

In the scenario of a positive result, the participant will isolate for another three days before re-integrating with the side without requesting an exit test.

Two negative tests on the course of a three-day mandatory isolation will be requisite for a player or support person to enter or re-enter the managed event environment and reintegrate with their side.

Broadcast and digital distributions

PCB has signed deals with some of the world's leading sports broadcasters and live streaming platforms to beam the matches of PSL7 to audiences around the world.

As a result of these deals, broadcasters including Fox Sports, ICC TV, Tapmad, Sony, Etisalat, Flow Sports, Sky NZ, Sky Sports, SuperSport, and Willow TV will be able to bring PSL7 to cricket fans in their respective areas of coverage.

Cricket fans in Pakistan will be able to watch PSL7 live through PTV Sports, A Sports, Ten Sports, and. Livestreaming rights for PSL7 have been granted to ICC TV and Tapmad TV.

Past champions

The first season of the PSL was played entirely in the United Arab Emirates owing to security concerns. Islamabad United took the first ever PSL trophy when they defeated Quetta Gladiators in the final.

Peshawar Zalmi surfaced as champions in the second edition of PSL, with Quetta Gladiators against losing out in the final. The crown for the third edition of PSL went to Islamabad United, who downed defending champions Peshawar Zalmi on 25 March 2018.

Quetta Gladiators finally clinched the trophy for PSL4, edging out Peshawar Zalmi on 17 March 2019 in Karachi. The year 2020 saw Karachi Kings rise to the top of the league when they defeated Lahore Qalandars in the final match of PSL5.

The reigning PSL champions are Multan Sultans, who took home PSL6 after defeating Peshawar Zalmi on 24 June 2021 in Abu Dhabi.

Islamabad United are the only side to have won two editions of PSL, while Lahore Qalandars are the only side yet to take a PSL trophy. Each of the remaining four sides have taken a trophy each.

PSL7 looks set to deliver a month of red hot competitive cricket, with all squads looking good. At the end of the day, irrespective of which of the six competing sides takes the trophy, the winners will be cricket and Pakistan.

The Day of Omicron

Accelerated vaccine rollout and stricter adherence to safety protocols will be key to surviving the 5th wave of Covid-19



By Noor Aftab

As the Omicron variant continues to drive the inevitable fifth wave of the Covid-19 global pandemic in Pakistan, healthcare professional and public health experts are emphasising the need for an urgent upscaling of all aspects of the official and public effort to beat back the menace of Coronavirus.

There is an urgent need to accelerate vaccine coverage, ensure stricter adherence to safety protocols, and institute more vigorous communications to dispel misconceptions.

The ongoing wave of Omicron in Pakistan mirrors the trends observed earlier in countries like South Africa, Britain and Denmark. It is clearly looking like it is spreading really quickly but, fortunately, there are signs that the variant is producing less severe infections.

Pakistan reported more than 7,000 Covid-19 cases in a single day on January 21, its highest daily number of infections since the pandemic emerged in November 2019. The moment was

an eerie echo of December 2020, when the first major variant of Covid-19 began infecting people around the world.

But a key difference now is that there are effective vaccines that have been widely deployed among the people.

Looming threat

There is a serious concern among healthcare professional the situation may worsen in the coming days as hospitalisations – including the intensive care units - from Omicron are on the uptick. The government must seize the opportunity available right now and should utilize all means, help remove misconceptions surrounding the Covid-19 vaccines, and reduce the gap in vaccination.

There is also a need to adopt the idea of smart working, which means making workplaces less crowded and allowing people to work from home as much as possible.

Special Assistant to the Prime Minister on Health Dr Faisal Sultan says there

would definitely be an increase in hospitalisations after people start getting infected with the Omicron variant. He has advised people to keep their guard up against Covid-19.

“There will be some increase in hospitalisation. How much, depends on the degree of spread and infection. International evidence suggests it spreads fast” he said. “How serious sickness it causes will be evident in a week or two”.

Vaccine mandate

The government has authorised booster vaccination shots for citizens over the age of 30. Vaccination of children over the age of 12 has been made mandatory to attend schools and children under 12 will go to schools at 50 percent attendance.

Free booster jabs

The government has announced that passengers seeking to travel outside of Pakistan can get free booster doses. According to a notification issued by the Ministry of Health, the government has decided to abolish booster shot fees.

People who are going abroad can get free booster jabs by showing their travel documents at vaccination centres. The booster dose is already free for the general public. Previously, PKR 1,250 was being charged for the booster shot from those who were travelling abroad.

Revised protocols

The government has revised Covid-19 protocols for mosques and announced that only fully vaccinated people would be allowed inside places of worship. The protocols were revised a day after Pakistan recorded its highest daily infections count at 7,678 since the pandemic started in 2020.

All schools with a high Covid-19 positivity ratio would remain closed for one week across the country.

New findings

According to a new study from the University of Hong Kong, the omicron variant multiplies 70 times faster in the human bronchial tubes than the initial Covid-19 infection or the delta variant. Their study also showed the omicron infection in the lung is significantly lower than the original SARS-CoV-2, which may be an indicator of lower disease severity.

The latest results also showed that the virus establishes a very local infection in the upper airways and has less chance to go and wreak havoc in the lungs. That would be welcome news—but a host's immune response plays an important part in disease severity, and scientists need more clinical data if they are to understand how Omicron's basic biology influences its disease progression in humans.

Faheem Younus, chief of Infectious Diseases at University of Maryland, said if anyone is infected by coronavirus, they should take rest and seek treatment. They should isolate and starve the virus inside the body before it jumps off from to someone else.

"Many raise the point that vaccines do not work or why would Covid-19 deaths rise in the United States", he said. "It is because only 62% people are vaccinated; 70 million unvaccinated Americans are driving Covid-19 deaths."

Children more vulnerable

Omicron's course of infection may also have implications for children. Young children have relatively small nasal passages, and babies breathe only through their noses. Such factors can make upper respiratory conditions more serious for children than for adults. Parents need to understand that the vaccines are the most important tool for protection, especially to avoid multisystem inflammatory syndrome in children, a rare and dangerous complication that can follow a mild Covid-19 infection.



Precautionary measures

- Get vaccinated as soon as it's your turn and follow local guidance on vaccination.
- Keep physical distance of at least one meter from others, even if they never appear to be sick. Avoid crowds and close contact.
- Wear a properly fitted mask when physical distancing is not possible and you are in poorly ventilated settings.
- Clean your hands frequently with hand rub or soap and water.
- Cover your mouth and nose with a bent elbow or tissue when you cough or sneeze. Dispose of used tissues immediately and clean hands regularly.
- If you develop symptoms or test positive for Covid-19, self-isolate until you recover.

Beware of myths

Chloroquine (or hydroxychloroquine), a common treatment for malaria and certain autoimmune diseases, has been studied as a preventative treatment for Covid-19. Evidence from these studies shows that chloroquine has little to no impact on illness, hospitalisation, or death.

Micronutrients, such as vitamins D and C and zinc, are critical for a well-functioning immune system and play a vital role in promoting health and nutritional well-being. There is currently no guidance on the use of micronutrient supplements as a treatment of Covid-19.

Dexamethasone should be reserved for patients who need it most. It should not be stockpiled. It provided no improvement for patients with mild symptoms. Dexamethasone is a corticosteroid used for its anti-inflammatory and immunosuppressive effects. For some Covid-19 patients on ventilators, a daily 6 mg dose of dexamethasone for 10 days improved their health.

Swimming in itself carries no risk as the Covid-19 virus does not spread through water. However, the virus spreads among people when someone has close contact with an infected person.

Shoes are not an area of concern anymore as the likelihood of Covid-19 being spread on shoes and infecting individuals is very low. As a precautionary measure, particularly in homes where infants and small children crawl or play on floors, consider leaving your shoes at the entrance of your home. This will help prevent contact with dirt or any waste that could be carried on the soles of shoes.

Higher Savings and Higher Productivity Remain Key to Economic Growth

There is only so much the IMF program will do to help put Pakistan's economy on its feet sustainably



By Mehtab Haider

While the road is now apparently clear for the revival of Pakistan's IMF bailout, not everybody is convinced the program or the measures instituted by the government to put it back on track can help put the country's economy on its feet.

Higher savings as a percentage of GDP and a higher productivity remain key to putting the country's economy on a sustained, high-growth trajectory. Sadly, however, policy options to achieve these are conspicuous by their absence from the agenda of Prime Minister Imran Khan's government.

Khan's beleaguered government had to accept tough policy prescriptions from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in a bid to avert a full-scale balance of payments crisis. Among them was the parliamentary approval for two controversial laws, which was a politically costly decision.

When Minister for Finance Shaukat Tarin assumed the charge of Finance Ministry after the rather unceremonious exit of Dr Abdul Hafeez Shaikh, he had made tall claims about how he would sell the IMF his home-grown

agenda. However, things turned out quite differently in practice and Islamabad had to accept very tough conditions of the IMF to reach a staff-level agreement.

In a visible hardening of attitude, the IMF required parliamentary approval of the minibudget and the controversial State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Amendment Bill 2021 as a prior action for the first time in the country's history. In the past, the mere submission of the bills of parliamentary approval would be sufficient. Observers say this amounts to an erosion of the Parliament's sovereignty, which was in effect under the gun to pass the two bills.

The law concerning the central bank remains controversial also because many in the country's political and civil society view it as weakening Pakistan's sovereign control of the State Bank of Pakistan. The supplementary finance bill or minibudget is unpopular because it has unleashed a tsunami of inflation to afflict the masses already groaning under the burden of double-digit inflation.

The passage of minibudget has

effectively subjected on hundreds of imported and locally manufactured products to a uniform 17 percent General Sales Tax (GST). Independent economists say expanding the scope of this indirect tax at a time of staggering inflation on all indices makes no economic sense.

As of December 2021, CPI based inflation stood at 12.3 percent, SPI on weekly basis at 20.9 percent, and WPI at 26.2 percent, indicating how the price hike has eroded the purchasing power of middle- and lower-income earners.

After enactment of the minibudget, CPI inflation is expected to rise to 13 percent and beyond as the inflationary impact of the expanded GST joins the already substantial inflationary pressure caused by soaring electricity and POL prices.

There are 462 items in the CPI-basket and withdrawal of GST exemptions on medicines, packaged food, laptops and other computers, and jacking up of withholding tax on mobile handsets by 50 percent on usage would certainly boost inflationary pressures.

The higher inflationary expectations would further add to inflationary pressures. Pakistan's import bill witnessed a surge mainly because of 60-70 percent increased commodities/food and petroleum products prices and the total import bill might touch the whopping figure of USD 70 to USD 80 billion for the current fiscal year.

It is generally believed that at time of higher inflation, the taxation measures are not taken because it can fuel further inflation. But the IMF's one-size-fits-all policy approach remained stuck with the removal of alleged distortions from the tax system as a criterion for the successful completion of the pending sixth review under the IMF program.

With enactment of the minibudget, the FBR's revenue target for the fiscal has jumped from PKR 5.8 trillion to PKR 6.1 trillion. However, independent tax experts estimate the revenue gain from the minibudget at PKR 150-200 billion instead of the officially estimated PKR 343 billion.

The FBR hopes to generate additional revenue to the tune of PKR 160 billion from the imposition of 17 percent GST on the raw materials of the pharmaceutical sector. However, it was in adjustable mode and the FBR has made a commitment to provide refunds within one or two months so the

taxpayers do not face liquidity problems.

The FBR would provide refunds of over PKR 30 billion more than its collected money, which is why the Chairman FBR claimed the prices of medicines in the domestic market should come down by 15 to 20 percent.

Another major revenue spinner is plant and machinery. The imposition standard 17 percent GST on plant and machinery is expected to fetch additional revenues of PKR 112 billion, which will also be in adjustable/refundable mode.

Only PKR 71 billion worth of additional revenue is expected from the withdrawal of GST on goods sold to end users and according to the government, with officials claiming the common man-related goods would carry inflationary impact of just PKR 2 billion.

If the IMF does not agree with the revenue estimates of PKR 343 to PKR 350 billion, Pakistan's EFF program may be in jeopardy. That may trigger a renegotiation of the program based on fresh economic data. Negotiations will then become even more challenging than the original negotiations because Pakistan's current account deficit and budget deficit had grown to huge proportions by the end of December 2021.

The government seems helpless on the face

of import-induced inflation. The economic managers argue that the prices of POL have doubled as crude prices have jumped from USD 42 to around USD 90 per barrel. The prices of palm oil stood at USD 570 per ton last year, which have now crossed USD 1,350 per ton. Pakistan has no control over these prices.

International market-induced price pressures have pushed up CPI-based inflation and there is nothing on the horizon to suggest those pressures would recede in the second half (January-June 2022 period) of the current fiscal year.

Prime Minister Imran Khan's government approached the IMF after exhausting all policy options to meet its external financing obligations.

The government inherited yawning current account deficit hovering around USD 18 billion as well as increased external debt and liabilities. Khan had approached friendly countries including China, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE for help to bridge the financing gap but nothing seemed to work.

Finally, Islamabad had to pick up an IMF deal carrying tough conditions. Soon after that, the Covid-19 pandemic struck and disrupted supply chains, sending shipping costs soaring manifold, and further compounding Pakistan's economic woes.



Soaring Energy Prices Hit Pakistan Where it Hurts

Climbing power tariffs and pump prices of petroleum fuels drive inflation ever higher



By Javed Mahmood

Already strapped with the staggering burden of double-digit inflation, businesses and households in Pakistan are bracing for the impact of a new tsunami of inflation resulting from the recent parliamentary approval of a minibudget. Even against this backdrop, soaring energy prices, seem to be hurting the economy and consumers more than anything else.

The cost of electricity constantly increased at an accelerated pace in Pakistan over the past few years. An analysis by the Truth International (TTI) reveals a consumer's electricity bill for January 2022 may show an increase by over 100 percent from January 2021 – even after taking into account the cheaper winter tariffs introduced by the authorities.

For instance, TTI got a bill of a consumer to evaluate change in the cost of electricity in just a year's period from Jan 2021 to January 2022 and the actual impact of the Energy Minister's offer to get discount on consuming more power from Nov-2021.

In January 2022, the consumer paid PKR 7,550 for consuming 326 units of electricity while in January last year, the same consumer had paid PKR 3,400 for 284 units. This calculates to a 122 percent increase in bill for using just over 15 percent more electricity.

Almost all the electricity consumers, whether businesses, industries, or households are struggling under the similar burden of hiked power tariffs.

Meanwhile, the average cost of each unit, including taxes consumed in January 2021 was PKR 11.98 while the average price of unit in January 2022 was PKR 23.20, including all taxes and fuel cost adjustment. This increase in value of unit price reflects an increase in the price of electricity by nearly 94 percent.

This despite the fact that in October 2021, Energy Minister Hammad Azhar announced that the government would reduce the cost of electricity for the

consumers who will utilize more units from January 2022.

Another important development is that in February 2021 the average cost of the unit was PKR 18 for the consumers utilizing 300 units but below 400 in a month and in January 2022 the average cost for users in this category was PKR 23+ /unit.

Additionally, the electricity bill shows that the government is using different tactics to extort maximum revenue from the power consumers. For instance, the actual cost of electricity of the consumer is PKR 4,700 for the month of January 2022 while the consumer paid a total of PKR 7,560 bill.

Thus, the bill carried general sales tax, TV license fee (although millions of people do not watch PTV but they are forced to pay fee with bills), fuel price adjustment, fuel cost surcharge and tariff rationalisation surcharge. The FPA, TR Surcharge, and FC Surcharge, in fact, are the tools to generate as much revenue from the consumers as is possible every month to fill the state's kitty.

The saga of extortion of money from power consumers does not end with the inclusion of fuel price adjustment cost and the government also charges 17 percent general sales tax on the amount, included in the bill as FPA/TR Surcharges, etc.

Observers say frequent increases in cost of electricity are an outcome of multiple failures and mismanagement on the part of the government. Efforts to curb power theft have come to nothing, the burgeoning circular debt continues to take its toll, and perhaps most importantly of all, the authorities' inability to ensure timely natural gas supplies has result to many thermal power plants running on the more expensive furnace oil.

A few days ago, the NEPRA allowed an increase of more than PKR 4/unit in electricity tariff, which will be recovered from the consumers with the bills to be issued in January and payable in February. With the media and consumers lamenting this electricity cost shock, the government filed another application with the NEPRA, seeking further increase of PKR 0.99/unit.

As the government has secured parliamentary approval for a mini-budget, consumers

are bound to face more electricity shocks in the months ahead due to conditions of the IMF which require abolition of subsidy and increase in tariff to reduce the circular debt.

Circular debt

In the first week of December 2021, the cabinet committee on energy (CCOE) reported an all-time high figure of PKR 2,419 billion for circular debt as of the end of October 2021. This included payables to power producers amounting to PKR 1,420 billion, GENCOs payables to fuel suppliers totalling to PKR 91 billion, and the amount parked to Power Holding Company, calculating to PKR 908 billion.

The CCOE said circular debt was emerging as a major problem for the federal government, power companies, and the consumers.

Officials said that in 2022-23, the energy cycle debt could add another one trillions rupees because of multiple reasons. Importantly, the circular debt surged by PKR 450 billion during the tenure of PML (N) which ended in April 2018.

The energy sector debt, nonetheless, continued to expand and it added another PKR 538 billion in FY-2020 and another PKR

130 billion in few months of the ongoing fiscal year 2021-22.

According to government's commitment with the IMF's, the circular debt was to be reduced to zero on monthly basis before the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic, but this did not happen and the consumers had to pay the price in the form of frequent increase in power bills on different pretexts.

Petroleum fuels

The story of pump prices of petroleum fuels is no different. A media report last week said petrol price in the country had surged from PKR 95.24 per litre to PKR 147.83 per litre under the incumbent government, reflecting an increase of PKR 52.59 per litre, translating to a 55.22 percent hike over 41 months. This looks like a rocketing trend, especially when compared with the cumulative 65 percent hike seen over the 10-year period from 16 January 2012 to 16 January 2022.

These sharp increases in energy prices continue to hamper economic recovery and stunt growth, especially in the wake of the devastation wrought by the Covid-19 global pandemic. Petroleum prices in particular drive inflation, rippling through all sectors of the economy.



Taming Pakistan's Public Debt Problem

Why the size and structure of Pakistan's public debt is unsustainable and what to do about it



By Azeem Waqas

The massive burden of public debt is exerting a crippling drag on Pakistan's economic and social development, and must be addressed before the country can hope to grow and prosper, independent economists and experts have said.

A study published by the Institute for Policy Reforms (IPR), a Lahore based think tank, says the high degree of indebtedness has made Pakistan vulnerable to economic shocks and weakened us politically vis-a-vis our powerful external lenders. Most importantly, it undermines our ability to invest in education and healthcare, something without which no socio-economic development is possible.

As of now, Pakistan's public debt stands at over PKR 40 trillion, according to Dr Shahid Mohmand, economist in Pakistan Institute of Development Economics (PIDE). Foreign debt is nearing USD 130 billion.

Dr Khaqan Najeem, a former advisor to the Ministry of Finance, says this level of debt is well above the upper limit of

60 percent of net Government debt as percentage of GDP as stipulated by Fiscal Responsibility and Debt Limitation Act of 2005.

FRDLA mandates the Government to formulate a debt reduction plan to bring down the debt to GDP ratio to below 60 percent. This limit has been continuously violated since FY 2016. The reasons for increase in debt are a large underlying fiscal deficit and increase in the rupee value of external debt due to depreciation of the rupee.

Dr Najeem explains that the future growth in the size of the federal government debt depends mainly on the sustainability in the growth of FBR revenues, and on the level of non-tax revenues including petroleum levy and State Bank profits.

There is also the need to arrest the rise of current expenditure, which rose from 5.6 trillion rupees in FY 2019 to 7.5 trillion rupees in FY 2022 – a rise of nearly 35 percent. Overall fiscal deficit management is thus as important as the primary deficit. The other key determi-

nants would be the rate of depreciation of the rupee in the future.

In particular, says Najeem, the authorities need to be vigilant about Pakistan's external financing requirements – including repayments on the country's short-, medium-, and long-term debt over a fiscal year plus the current account deficit.

According to Dr Mohmand, our external financing requirements have risen to such high levels that despite our exports and remittances (FDI is negligible), we have to contract around USD 15 billion of new debt every year to stave off a default.

IPR seems to concur when it says the “most critical problem faced by the Pakistan economy is repayment and servicing of external debt” and that instead of bringing economic growth, “borrowing creates more borrowing with an external account crisis waiting to happen”.

During the 39 months of Prime Minister Imran Khan's tenure in government until now, external debt has increased

by USD 31.8 billion, although PTI government has also made record debt repayments of USD 42.25 billion. The surge in loan repayments and Current Account Deficit (CAD) led to high borrowing.

In Pakistan Muslim League - Nawaz (PML-N) tenure, external debts had increased by USD 34.3, and total debt repayments made by PMLN were USD 33.36 (21 percent lesser than PTI), while SBP reserves raised by only USD 4.5 billion.

Former Chairman FBR, Shabbar Zaidi says Pakistan's external debt today is USD 127 billion and forex reserves are USD 27 billion, showing net Liability of USD 100 billion. Annual debt repayable in next 5 years is USD 40 billion approximately. Current Account Deficit (CAD) for next 5 years around USD 45 billion.

IPR report states that it is important to know that foreign borrowing is a choice that GoP exercises. There is nothing inevitable or binding about it. It can be avoided. "The reason we are in such a situation is that the loans are not used for the purpose of development. And when they are, their use is inefficient.

"Thus, the use of external loans does not generate the returns needed to repay them. These loans are not cheap, as even concessional credit entail high servicing expense. Continuing to believe in their benefits reinforces the lack of fiscal discipline."

Zaidi is of the view that present Federal financial structure is unviable. Out total federal revenues are PKR 6,500 billion, out of which PKR 3,500 b are distributed to the provinces through National Finance Commission.

The net income of the federal government is around PKR 3,000 billion, out of which debt servicing PKR 2800 billion goes to debt servicing, PKR 1,500 billion to defence, and PKR 500 billion to SOE losses. This leaves the federal government with almost no resources to run and develop the country, says Zaidi, arguing that the need of the hour is to restructure the federal financial structure.

In 2017, a mere four years ago, Pakistan's total debt payment amounted to 39 percent of FBR taxes. Today, our total debt payment consumes 75 percent of FBR taxes.

Zaid said that economic security is vital for national security. "The message is loud and clear that economic managers cannot anymore be relaxed on this issue. As I have repeatedly said "there cannot be politics on economic issues."

Experts believe that real issue is not size of debt, but how it is managed within larger economy. Zaidi has presents some radical solutions which include extremely good relations with the US and the Western bloc, recognition of Israel, transparency and limitation of CPEC, and settlement of Afghan Issue.

He also says the government must re-examine the import bill and consider a complete ban for ten years for luxury items. Import substitution, no dollarization, location of exportable surplus industries in Southern Pakistan for saving energy cost, and legislation against hawala and hundi are among other items on his prescription.

Finally, Zaidi advocates restructuring of domestic debt and use of national assets for debt retirement purposes, which he says should also help vamp up the exchange regime and documentation of the economy.



Disciplinary Gangs and the Marginalisation of Dissent in Pakistan

Why the Pakistani academia has no hope of progress without breaking the stranglehold of the security state



“The loyalty of academic gang members to each other and to the code of the gang is easily as fierce as that of street gangs.”

– Thomas J. Scheff

The disciplinary tradition of Pakistani academia begins and ends with a security-centric neorealist paradigm of looking at both international and domestic politics; sovereignty appears to be the sole official lens through which to respond and preserve it becomes the primary concern.

This is true of most of the Third World states, and especially of the postcolonial South Asia as Kanti Bajpai argues. Following independence, these postcolonial states swiftly conformed to the realist conceptions of state survival, self-interest, sovereignty and security.

The conformity of these states to privilege realist discourses as political, strategic and socioeconomic norms, as Navnita Chadha Behera argues, ‘fitted admirably with powerful indigenous impulses for maintaining national security, independence and frontiers.’

Pakistan, similarly, was confronted with multiple security, political, and socioeconomic challenges after the independence. Beginning with the asymmetrical distribution of resources during the partition, Pakistan’s policy preferences were (and remain), by and large, security-centric because of the constant threat to its territorial integrity by an influential counterpart, India.

At the same time, in its formative years, the state was dominated by the military-bureaucratic oligarchy, but the balance of power within this oligarchy shifted after Ayub Khan’s coup d’état in 1958, and the military establishment emerged to be the dominant partner.

The successive military dictatorships since further strengthened the military’s position and confined Pakistan, as Ahmed Waqas Waheed argues, to a ‘security-centered understanding of sovereignty,’ a trend that still persists.

The domestic instability further added fuel to the fire and pushed the state to be in a

permanent state of paranoia of seeing social and political resistance as foreign conspiracies. Dissent, therefore, is also seen through the narrow prism of security. It is manipulated to delegitimise alternative and interdisciplinary debates.

Clearly, the securitisation of academic discourses and disciplines comes from a broader history of Pakistan’s dependency on security-centric neorealism, to which academics subscribed without any sort of problematisation.

In today’s Pakistani academia, the situation is more problematic with former state officials incumbent on important positions at universities and think tanks that assume ‘the responsibilities of being gate-keepers of a community of knowledge producers.’ The top positions are mostly, if not entirely, occupied by retired military and civil bureaucrats whose understanding of International Relations and Politics research revolves around either the Kashmir conflict or Indian threat to Pakistan.

For instance, influential think tanks such as the Institute of Regional Studies (IRS), Islamabad Policy and Research Institute (IPRI), Institute of Strategic Studies, Centre for International Strategic Studies (CISS), and Pakistan Institute of International Affairs, to name a few, are run by incumbent or former civilian bureaucrats, while others such as NUST Institute of Policy Studies (NIPS), Centre for Global and Strategic Studies (CGSS) and National Defence University's think tank ISSRA are run by retired military officials.

The state of universities is no different, particularly in Islamabad, where most of the social sciences research institutes are headed by retired military officials. Their undue obsession with the Kashmir conflict and now Afghanistan, for example, shuts out all alternative avenues of exploring International Relations and confines the discipline within hard-core conflict and security ambits.

The alternative knowledge is of course being (re)produced, but it has been pushed to the margins by the dominant players' hegemony of International Relations in Pakistan and the world over. It is, by far, the most severe impact of neorealism's stranglehold that it makes other efforts invisible. As illustrated by Thomas Scheff, these academic gangs peripheralise and displace alternative ideas and interdisciplin-

ary debates as insignificant, utopian or disloyal to the idea of nationhood and state sovereignty.

Any perspective outside the knowledge and interest of conventional disciplinary traditions is therefore met with hostility in the Pakistani social sciences academy, especially International Relations and other relevant disciplines, because of the discipline's uncritical securitisation.

From universities to research think-tanks, the academic disciplinary gangs reciprocally discipline the thought of students and researchers in ways that constrain interdisciplinary, innovative and aesthetic endeavours to understand the processes of international and national politics, and therefore, to address some of the most pressing political challenges of our day.

For instance, there are scholarly inquiries into the role of emotions in decision-making and politics, the potential of political and fictional discourses on 'Islamic Terrorism' in perpetuating Islamophobia across the globe, the prospect of aesthetics to enable efforts for peacebuilding and the importance of media in constructing public opinions for political gains much like what the American media and the Bush administration did to legitimise the Iraqi invasion or the Western media's decontextualised misrepresentation of the Palestinian resistance.

However, for there to be inclusive disciplinary growth, the path forward would have to go beyond just encouraging the kind of interdisciplinary work that frequently entails 'importing' concepts from other disciplines into established frameworks of International Relations. It has to go beyond critiquing the narrow and problematic nature of conventional disciplinary traditions.

The most imaginative response to the current political crisis may probably lay in initiatives to convey alternative narratives about the international, unencumbered by the limits of dominant discourses. As Darby asserts, "to decolonise IR is to deschool oneself from the discipline in its current dominant manifestations".

The key is to recognise that the international is not a separate sphere from the rest of the social and political world, as Roland Bleiker argues. It has to incorporate insights from fields as diverse as psychology, neuroscience, literature, theatrics, biology, and art for multiple parallel perspectives and policy solutions.

Lastly, it is important to do away with the disciplinary gangs whose primary concern is to show loyalty to the gang and its code of conduct for their professional progression.

By Arsim Tariq



Not So Fast, Says EASA

The dark clouds hovering over Pakistan's aviation industry are fusing to go away for now



By Hamza Qureshi

Pakistani aviation industry's hopes for an early return to the European skies have been dashed by European Union Aviation Safety Agency (EASA), saying it would conduct its own due diligence before taking a decision in the matter.

In a letter of CEO Pakistan International Airline (PIA), Air Marshal Arshad Malik, EASA said that PIA could only be allowed to fly in European Union after it is able to satisfy an EASA audit.

Earlier this year, Pakistan Civil Aviation Authority (PCAA) was able to successfully resolve the Significant Safety Concerns (SSC) raised by International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO) in 2020. The hopes were high since then that Pakistan International Airlines (PIA) will be able to restart its operation to the United Kingdom and European Union in short order.

Soon after the resolution of SSC, the PIA CEO wrote a letter to EASA asking for lifting of suspension of PIA's TCO Authori-

zation. The letter dated 7 January 2022 maintained the resolution of SSC provided the grounds of resumption of PIA's flights to European Union.

In his letter, Executive Director EASA Patrick Ky agreed with PIA CEO that lifting of SSC was an important step towards potential lifting of suspension of PIA's TCO Authorization. He said the EASA was already in consultation with PCAA to discuss and analyse its oversight capacity.

Ky said the EU Commission was to monitor the situation in Pakistan and also the outcome of ICAO USOAP audit conducted between 29 November and 10 December last year.

The letter hinted at the possibility of an EASA audit of both PIA and PCAA prior to the lifting of PIA's TCOA suspension. EASA have also mentioned its preconditions for the audit, including security of its personnel involved in on-site audit. The technical audit will be performed in collaboration with EU

Commission and therefore might require some time to finalise the details.

EASA seems honed on determining the robustness of the certifications and oversight capacity of PCAA. It would also consider the shortcomings that led to the ICAO SSC and the subsequent efforts that led to its resolution. The EASA letter also mentioned that the audit and technical evaluation depended on the Covid-19 pandemic and its daily evolutions.

PIA spokesperson is hopeful that EASA is ready for conducting the audit. He shared that PIA will write to EASA next week for finalisation of audit dates. He anticipated that the EASA audit team would visit Pakistan in somewhere mid of February, unless hindered by Covid restrictions.

Prior to this response from EASA, the PIA has been claiming that it had satisfied the observations of EASA. PIA officials were keen to give the impression that resuming of PIA flight operation was a matter of days.

Healthtech Will Be No Substitute for Human Touch, Even in 2022

The advent of healthtech has rendered a lot many things redundant, but the healing magic of human touch is not one of them



By Amna Shoaib

With the new year comes new hope and optimism, and then as always, each of us strives to accelerate more positive change in making the world a better place for everybody. Following the epidemic, we have seen an upsurge in acceptance of digital technology in the healthcare sector, as well as health taking centre stage, not just at an institutional level, but also as a priority in the minds of our citizens.

People are more aware of their health today, and they are concerned about keeping themselves and their loved ones healthier. They are taking control of their health, thanks to the emerging technologies that provide novel solutions for measuring health and wellbeing.

Telemedicine for virtual consultations, smart wearables that provide data on health and wellbeing, and virtual monitoring of key health parameters for patients with chronic disorders such as non-communicable diseases are all increasingly commonplace in today's health environment.

Today's healthcare consumer has easier access to health information than ever before, as well as the opportunity to participate in their own health and make informed decisions. As healthcare shifts from a 'cure' to a 'prevention' perspective, healthcare practitioners must shift their lens to perceive a consumer, not simply a patient.

This would be a paradigm shift because it would move the focus away from treating patients and toward preventing people from being ill in the first place. This change would be transformative, with far-reaching implications for individuals, their families, and even nations' economic momentum.

While technology continues to play an increasingly important role in healthcare, we must be careful not to allow it to overshadow the critical human aspects of treatment. Patients want doctors who listen to them and care about them, don't rush them, and communicate effectively, according to the findings of a Deloitte survey of healthcare consumers.

This means that telehealth or digital services must deliver a personal experience that is comparable to a face-to-face consultation. Our focus, therefore, must be on leveraging high-end technology to create efficiency, better outcomes, and reach, while also emphasising the importance of the human touch in providing care.

Patients' ability to communicate with their doctors and healthcare providers was impaired as a result of the epidemic and subsequent lockdowns. Here, we must use AI and data from smart healthcare devices to take patient monitoring to the next level of tailored treatment and foster a 'therapeutic link'

amongst stakeholders in the digital health ecosystem.

Against this backdrop, humanising healthcare delivery through technology will enable doctors and patients to collaborate as partners on the path to good health, with patients putting their trust in their doctors and sharing equal responsibility for their own health.

This healthcare revolution will be especially useful in the fight against noncommunicable diseases (NCDs). This is crucial because the rising frequency of chronic diseases poses a far greater threat than the virus that has been dominating our mind space since March 2019.

We've already seen cutting-edge technology bring in innovative treatment approaches like robotic surgery, proton therapy, enhanced imaging techniques, and more over the years. Of course, this will continue.

However, now is the time to put the patient at the centre of the emerging healthcare paradigm. Let us make sure that consumer health technologies maintain their human characteristics while also empowering consumers to take control of their own health.

Let 2022 be the year we use technology to humanise healthcare and ensure that our high tech solutions are complimented by human touch.

Finally, a Digital Utopia - from Japan No Less

Digital dystopias have for long been the staple of the film world. Belle by Japanese anime director Mamoru Hosoda dares to be different



TTI Report

We humans are a deeply divided lot in terms of attitude. While the young among us are eager to run with the new without regard to merit, older humans are fundamentally backward-looking. Hence, every successive generation pines for the good old days of its own youth and sees the new ways as irreparably decadent even as the young are embracing them and making them their own.

Nowhere is this paradoxical dichotomy of attitudes more apparent than with respect to the realm of role-playing games (RPGs) and parallel worlds made possible by the Internet and allied technologies. While our youth flock to the various emerging RPGs and other virtual reality experiences, the more seasoned among us never have anything positive to say about these.

A case in point would be how our established writers and artists always take a dystopian view of the hitech world emerging around us. Fortunately, Japanese anime director Mamoru Hosoda is not one of them. He sees the web as an ever-evolving realm of exciting potential.

His attitude is embodied in his aesthetic

approach to visualising the digital world of his latest feature *Belle*, released in the US in January 2022 and due to be released in the UK in February.

Seen by critics as a new, digital-age take on the classic theme of *Beauty and the Beast*, it follows the life of a teenage girl Suzu, living in the Japanese countryside with her widowed father, with whom he has a complicated relationship.

Suzu is somewhat estranged from his father because of his lingering grief, which translates into his lack of understanding of the teenager's emotional needs. Unhappy with her real-world life, Suzu finds herself immersed in a parallel virtual reality world of "U", where she is the internet popstar Bell.

Her immediate viral fame in this setting eventually brings her into contact with another character of U: "The Beast", with whom Suzu feels a mysterious kinship.

"I think the fact that there is this other world where we can be another version of ourselves [helps to show] that we are not just what we show to society," Hosoda has

been quoted as saying by BBC Culture.

"Belle and Suzu are so different that they're virtually different people, but they're actually the same person. Sometimes we end up believing that we are only that one side of ourselves, but actually we have many dimensions. And learning that and believing that helps us to be more free."

BBC Culture's Kambole Campbell says the generally bright, optimistic view that Hosoda's films take towards the virtual space immediately makes him stand apart from his contemporaries. "Many landmark anime films concerning the internet have viewed it as pathological, whether in encouraging possessive parasocial relationships and fake identities, or enabling new ways for ruling bodies to be invasive.

"One such film is Satoshi Kon's 1997 anime *Perfect Blue*, where the newfound intimacy that the internet provides with strangers is seen as disturbing and destabilising; its pop-singer-turned-actress protagonist Mima is stalked by obsessive fans and discovers a website set up by someone pretending to be her.

“As Mima loses grip on reality Kon's use of subjective perspective, immersing us in the protagonist's point of view, leads us to mistrust the very images that we witness, in a manner that evoked the internet's potential as vehicle for fabrication, where our online personas become malleable constructs, well before social media was even born.

“There's also a claustrophobia to Perfect Blue's portrayal of digital living, which contrasts with Hosoda's visualisation of it as offering boundless and borderless social space, and perhaps even liberation from the body itself.

Campbell then asserts that bringing the virtual connectivity of the internet to cinematic life isn't something reserved for animation, of course. “You could call it the basis of one of the most popular, influential sci-fi blockbusters in modern memory: Lana and Lilly Wachowski's *The Matrix* – which, in 1999, reflected the new online world and folded together a wealth of digital culture with theories about simulation as well as video games, kung-fu movies, wuxia, and anime.

“Those interests are all channelled into a futuristic digital universe that looks like ours, but where computer functions are essentially the laws of nature – a system of control that the film's rebel protagonists learn to shape. The Wachowskis evoked club culture and fetishwear in the film's iconic costume design, an element which affirmed the idea of this virtual space as a place for reinvention.

“The recent sequel, *The Matrix Resurrections* continued this sartorial theme in a slightly different way, through the character of Morpheus (now played by Yahya Abdul-Mateen II) and his embrace of colourful fashions. The virtual space can be oppressive, both films suggest, but once mastered, it can also be a place for exhilarating self-realisation”.

He cites a few more examples of cynical cinematic takes on the internet, before accentuating how Belle takes a more romantic, immersive perspective from the start, launching the audience head first into one of Suzu/Belle's virtual concerts.

“As she belts out the original song “U” by Japanese collective millennium parade, the scene is awash with eye-popping colour, the protagonist's digital avatar wearing a gown of red roses while she surfs a giant whale that doubles as both stage and sound system; the flowers and sea creatures serve as immediate markers of a gentler, more organic online world than we might expect.

“From there, the film shows an internet genuinely reborn as a parallel communal space, geared towards the people that use it rather than those who might make money off them.” Belle presents a utopian vision of what the internet could be, and Campbell says it feels radical. U is not just incredible to look at, but it's also a free and borderless public space.

The makeup of Belle's creative team affirms and validates the internet utopianism of the

film. For instance, Hosoda discovered the film's conceptual artist Eric Wong online and sourced key artists from around the world.

What is more, combined with Bell's floral costumes, the incorporation of the film's flattened drawing style, in keeping with the 2D used for the film's vision of the real world and full of organic shapes, further emphasises Belle's conception of the internet as a natural extension of our world, rather than a rival to it.

Suzu's performances as Bell take inspiration from her offline existence – and conversely she has to put the learnings from her online persona into action in the real world in order to fully grow as a person. It is in pondering those real-world benefits of Suzu's online life that U and Belle as a whole become almost transcendently beautiful.

On the other hand, while Belle's portrayal of U is bright and hopeful, it is also not blind to the potential realities, cruelties and consequences of the internet in effectively making the world smaller, and opening its users up to a new kind of scrutiny.

In sum, to quote Campbell again, “Hosoda's vision of the internet is beautiful not just because of the attention to detail in its phenomenal production design but also because of the way that it foregrounds human imagination and human interaction, which is (mostly) resistant to the interference of corporate interest.”



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 3)

Descent of Jesus and final encounters

Continuation of the Hadith from subsection Al Mahdi #4, he (Dajjal) would then call (that split young man) and he will come forward laughing with his face gleaming and it would be at this time that Allah will send Christ, son of Mary, and he will descend at the white minaret in the eastern side of Damascus wearing two garments lightly dyed with saffron and placing his hands on the wings of two Angels. When he (Christ) would lower his head, there would fall beads of perspiration from his head, and when he would raise it up, beads like pearls would scatter from it. Every non-believer who would smell the odor of his person would die and his breath would reach as far as he would be able to see. He would then search for him (Dajjal) until he would catch hold of him at the gate of Ludd (could be Lod Air force base in Ben Gurion International Airport) and would kill him.

—as reported by An-Nawwas b. Sam'an

Gog and Magog

Then a people whom Allah had protected would come to Jesus, son of Mary, and he would wipe their faces and would inform them of their ranks in the paradise, and it would be under such conditions that Allah would reveal to Jesus these words: I have brought from amongst my servants such people

(Gog Magog) against whom none would be able to fight, you take your people safely to Tur, and then Allah would send Gog and Magog and they would swarm down from every slope. The first of them would pass the lake Tiberias and drink out of it. And when the last of them would pass, he would say: there was once water there. Jesus and his companions would be besieged (at Tur, and they would be so much hard pressed) that the head of an ox would be dearer to them than one hundred dinars and Allah's Apostle, Jesus, and his companions would supplicate Allah, who would then send to them insects/virus (that would attack the neck of Gog and Magog) and in the morning they would all perish like one single person. Jesus and his companions would then come down to the earth, and they would not find as much space as a single span which is not filled with their putrefaction and stench.

Jesus and his companions would then beseech Allah, who would send birds whose necks would be like those of Batin camels, and they would carry them and throw them where God would will. Then Allah would rain which no house of clay or (the tent of) camel's hair would keep out, and it would wash away the earth until it could appear to be a mirror.

Then the earth would be told to bring forth its fruits and restore its blessing and, as a result thereof, there would grow (such a big) pomegranate that a group of persons would be able to eat that, and seek shelter under it and milk cow would

give so much milk that a whole party would be able to drink it. And the milk camel would give such (a large quantity of) milk that the whole tribe would be able to drink out of that.

And at that time Allah would send a pleasant wind which would soothe (people) even under their armpits, and would take the life of every Muslim and only the wicked would survive, who would commit adultery like asses and the last hour would come to them.

—as reported by An-Nawwas b. Sam'an

Addition to this Hadith that Gog Magog would walk until they would reach the mountain of Al-Khamar and it is a mount of Bait-ul-Maqdis, and they would say: we have killed those who are upon the earth. Let us now kill those who are in the sky, and they would throw their arrows at the sky and the arrows would return to them besmeared with blood. And in the narration of Ibn Hujr (the words are): I have sent such persons (Gog and Magog) that none would dare fight against them.

—as reported by Jabir



Jesus son of Mary or Al Masih

1. Allah Messenger (PBUH) said: by Allah, son of Mary would be a just ruler. He will break the cross, kill the pig. Will terminate Jizya (head tax on non-Muslims). Young camels will roam freely. People's hearts would be purified from vengeance, hatred, and jealousy. Jesus would call people towards riches but due to abundance in riches nobody would come forward.

—as reported by Abu Huraira

2. Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said:Jesus, son of Mary, would descend. Leader of the Muslim prayers (jamaat) would ask him to lead, but Jesus would refuse, saying Allah has exalted Muslim community (Ummat) to perform this duty now.

—as reported by Jabir

Two blowings of the trumpet

Allah's Messenger (PBUH) said: between the two blowings of the Trumpet (there would be an interval of forty). They said: Abu Herrera, do you mean forty days? Forty months? Forty years?

Every time he said: I cannot say anything.

Then Allah would cause the water to descend from the sky and they (people) will sprout like vegetable. The only thing in a man which would not decay would be one bone (spinal cord) from which the whole frame would be reconstituted on the day of resurrection.

—as reported by Abu Huraira

Shi'a Muslim Eschatology perspective

Most of the Muslim End times description mentioned are the Sunni Muslim narrative, though one out of many. According to Shi'a perspective appearance of al Mahdi would be actually the reappearance of their Imam Ghaib (Imam in Occultation), their twelfth Imam Muhammad Ibn ul Hasan al Mahdi (Imam e Zaman), the son of Imam Hasan al Askari. They believe he went into major Occultation in 941 AD, and lives like Khizr (PBUH), the Green One and will reappear ahead of the descent of Jesus Christ (PBUH).

Imam Ja'far al Sadiq states the five signs that will come to pass before the appearance of Imam al Mahdi as follows:

1. The appearance of Sufyani (a tyrant ruler of Syria).
2. The appearance of al Yamani, a Yemeni who will give support to Imam al Mahdi.
3. The loud cry/shriek in the sky.
4. Martyrdom of Nafs e Zakiyyah (happened in 762 AD)
5. The earth swallowing the Sufyani army at Baida between Makkah and Medina.

According to Shi'a eschatology, al Yamani will prepare grounds for the appearance of Imam al Mahdi and the al Mahdi will pave the way for the mission of Jesus Christ (PBUH). Both will join hands to defeat the Dajjal (anti-Christ). Then Jesus Christ will rule the world unchallenged. The rest of the events are almost the same as mentioned in part 2 of this series.

In conclusion, it may be noted that although eschatology did play a hidden role in the political movements, dynastic takeovers, conflicts and hope in the darkest of times in Muslim history, a Muslim is not supposed to use end times prophesies as a crutch for inaction.

A Muslim must follow the injunctions for daily living laid down in Sharia according to the Quran and Sunnah. His personal interest in the Divine Justice of End Times is that the balance tilts in favour of his good deeds and his life is declared a success by the Creator.

As one scholar said, "plan and prepare for this world as if you will live forever and prepare for the next world as if you will die the next moment".

Still, there is no denying that future collective attitudes, violent events, and wars - especially among the Abrahamic religions - will be greatly influenced by the eschatological views of their followers.

Working Class Leadership is the Key

Whether it arrives by revolution or evolution, change cannot be real unless led by workers



By Rana Azam

The three basic principles of Marxism neither change nor cease to hold true at any point along the continuum of the development of class society. They are dialectics, surplus value, and class conflict.

The only thing that changes, then, is the structure of the classes. While this is true, it may need some elaboration. True, because these basic tenets of Marxism are immutable as laws. We take them for granted. This is because when we say that they do not change under any circumstances, it may give the impression that these laws are static, dead, and immobile. That, however, is not the case; they are living and dynamic.

Ours is the age of social media and by that token, of short attention spans. We are no longer accustomed to reading long form articles. Points that need elaboration are therefore sometimes best left alone until it is expressly called for.

Another reason for leaving lengthy ideological expositions for a future time is that while the global communist movement has recovered from the shock of the collapse of the socialist bloc, it is yet to regain its former levels of romantic appeal.

We do not know for sure when teahouses will be inhabited again, when young people will have time for these ideological discussions, when workers' slogans will reverberate in the fields, mills, factories, and educational institutions based on ideological struggle.

But the elaboration of the points at hand is incomplete due to a lack of attention. The human being should also have room for the possibility of error, ignorance, and doubt in his speech. That is the way of learning.

What is more, it is said that if the knowledge is not increased during the statement of knowledge, it is not complete. Doubt is the basic condition of dialogue, without

which a debate remains barren, degenerating to the level of a bludgeon with which to beat the opponent.

To return to the crux of the matter, when we say that these laws are living, dynamic, and moving, we believe that they have been changing with the period of time and space. The primary contradiction sometimes becomes secondary and the secondary sometimes becomes the primary, just as in the early stages of civilisation, the only contradiction humans had been with natural elements, such as heat, cold, hunger, fire, etc.

But as soon as a group of humans enters the stage of farming, in addition to the contradiction with nature, humans start experiencing the social contradiction. For example, when existing production laws in the presence of current relations between the producers do not result in development, the contradiction of producers' relations becomes primary.

On the other hand, as long as the production laws continue to develop, they remain in the primary position. When such a contradiction comes to the level of its qualitative change, then the productive relations, superstructure, politics, culture, etc., express themselves in the form of playing a real and decisive role.

At this stage, the creation and dissemination of the revolutionary ideology take precedence. For example, when we say that in the general evolution of history, social existence determines social consciousness, at the same time we acknowledge that the mind is focused on material things and this has an effect on social existence.

But when it comes to the general ideological position, the structure is again paramount. That is the correct ideological position. Other cases are for a specific time and place. This is the true law of dialectical materialism.

Similarly, if we take the law of surplus value, we believe that surplus value is the exploitation of the labour that the capitalist puts in his coffers in the form of profit. But the question is whether there is value,

capital, market, and rule of law.

The socialist sense, which is completely different from the capitalist sense, will not survive even after the revolution. Not for the benefit of an individual or a special class (capitalist) but as a service to the life of the people. But for how long? This remains a question for the future.

Now, before considering the class struggle, let us determine the class and non-class contradictions first. They include class contradiction, imperialist contradiction, anti-imperialist contradiction of the world communist movement and the socialist countries, strong contradictions, gender, and other contradictions in non-class contradictions. These contradictions spread and shrink over time.

Let us look at it historically and geographically. For example, in Latin America, under the leadership of various forms of the Left, the anti-imperialist secondary contradiction is playing a real and decisive role as a private contradiction.

As Vietnam played in the past, wherever national liberation movements took place,

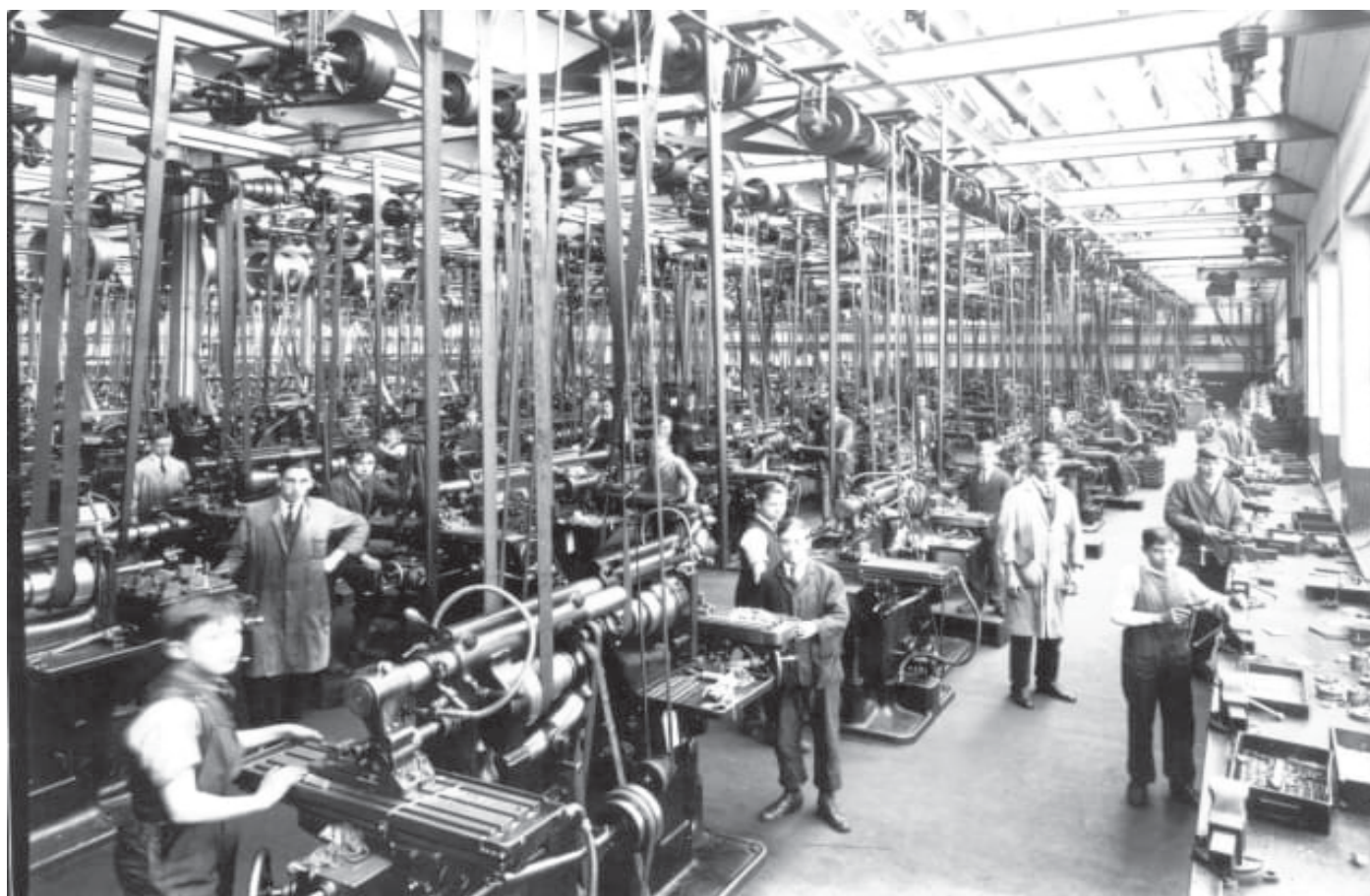
anti-imperialist hostility took the form of a primary contradiction. But in some places (such as Vietnam), the working class came out of the anti-imperialist struggle and became the ruler.

All this was possible only where there was a party representing the working people armed with revolutionary ideology, about which Lenin has said, "There can be no revolutionary unity without revolutionary ideology", but if our excuse is that the workers are not yet organised, then we will leave our name like cowards and hide behind the middle class.

Yes, the lower strata of the middle class do indeed play an important role in the revolution due to their discontentment, but their role is important only when the working class is the vanguard in the leadership of its representative party and plays this role during the revolution.

This is the lesson of revolutions from France to the present day, whether it is social change through revolution or election.

The writer belongs to Awami Workers Party.



What's the Big Deal about Humayun Saeed Playing Princess Di's Pakistani Love Interest?

The crowning glory of his multifaceted career marks the breaking breaking of the glass ceiling for Pakistani artistes



By Kaukab Jahan

In a good news for the Pakistanis sick and tired of Indians and other Asians playing Pakistani characters in Western entertainment productions, Humayun Saeed has landed the role of Dr Hasnat in the fifth season of Netflix original historical drama The Crown.

The news took Pakistanis by storm. The development is being seen as a major breakthrough for Pakistani talent to get into the streaming world of entertainment.

It is also the very first time that a Pakistani actor is appearing in an original production screening on a major OTT platform. Earlier, the roles of Pakistanis in such platforms were played by Indian or other Asian actors, with characters quickly devolving to stereotypes, which always irked many performers and critics here.

The Crown is a Netflix Original historical drama based on the reign of Queen Elizabeth II, created and principally written by Peter Morgan and produced by Left Bank Pictures and Sony Pictures Television for Netflix.

So far it has aired 4 seasons on Netflix and Season 5 is currently being filmed in London. The season will cover one of the most raucous periods of the royal family's recent history, focusing on the ending of Charles and Diana's marriage and its aftermath on the royal family.

Humayun Saeed is well established and considered among the finest actors of Pakistan, started his career some 25 years back with television drama. At the beginning of his career, he

was declared the best actor for his performance in the long play Ab Tum Ja Saktay Ho.

Saeed made his film debut in 1999 with Samina Peerzada's movie Inteha opposite Meera. He portrayed the negative role in the film and went on to receive the National Award – Best Actor – for his role in his very first film. There was no looking back for him after this as he continued to come with successful projects one after another.

He is the recipient of various awards for his acting skills including the famous Lux Style Awards and Hum Awards. This year, he also has been awarded Pride of Performance by the President of Pakistan on 23 March 2021.

Saeed is also credited with helping revive the Pakistan film industry in 2013 by producing the film Mien Hoon Shahid Afridi. He also acted in the film.

At present Saeed is one the major forces in Pakistani film and television industry and a co-founder of the media production house Six Sigma Plus which makes immense projects on both the platforms, television drama serials and commercials introducing new talent and ideas.

The role of Dr Hasnat Khan in The Crown would be his first entry into the digital world.

The character of Princess Diana is being played by Elizabeth Debicki in Season 5 of The Crown, replacing Emma Corrin who appeared as the Princess Season 4.

Dr. Hasnat Khan is a British-Pakistani heart surgeon who worked at London's Royal Brompton Hospital when he started dating Princess Diana after her separation from Prince Charles.

Khan in 2004, in a statement to the Metropolitan police London, confirmed that he was in a relationship with Diana from 1995 to 1997.

It was believed that Hasanat Khan broke up with Diana, but he stated that she broke up with him after meeting Dodi al Fayed. She famously entered into a relationship with al Fayed and was with him when they died in a fatal car accident in 1997.

In the statement, submitted from Pakistan, Dr. Khan also revealed that he had considered his life with Princess Diana but believed the situation would be unbearable with the press chasing her every move.

In another statement, he also mentioned that he believed that the only way their prospective marriage could work was moving to Pakistan, which Diana had discussed with Jemima Goldsmith, at the time married to Pakistani cricketer Imran Khan and had moved to Pakistan.

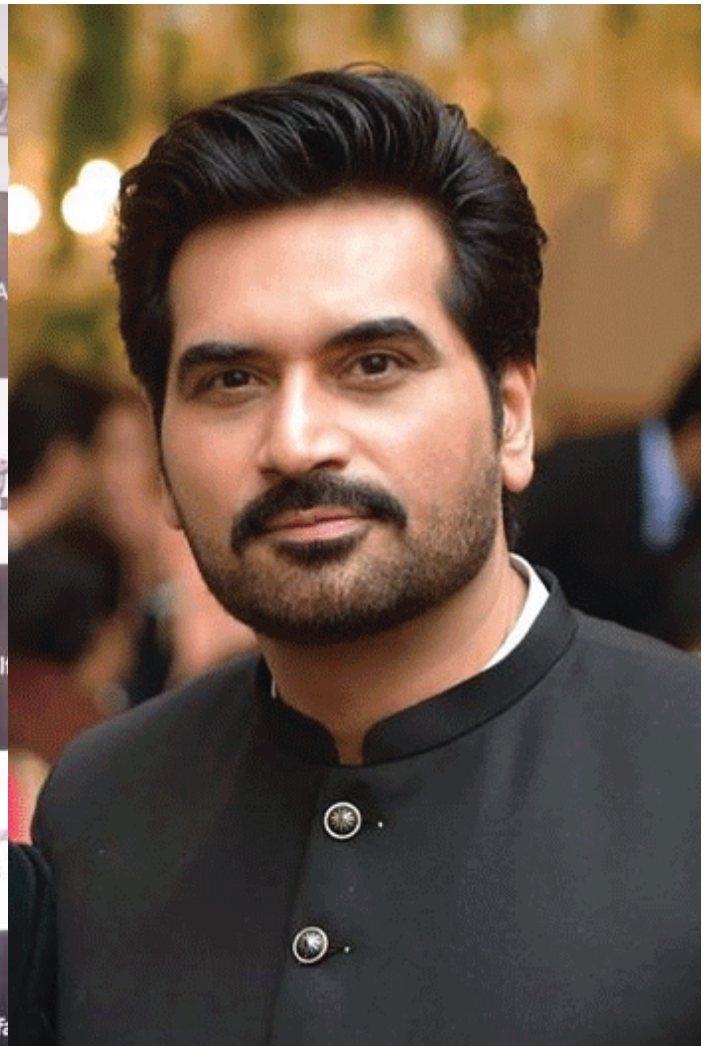
Jemima Khan, a close friend of Princess Diana, was co-writing and consulting role on the upcoming fifth season but when her co-writ-

ing agreement was not honoured, and she realized that particular storyline would not necessarily be told as respectfully or compassionately as it was hoped, she requested all her contributions be removed from the series and also declined a credit.

Goldsmith was supposed to compose particularly those episodes which concerned Princess Diana's last years before she died. "After a great deal of thought, having never spoken publicly about any of this before, I decided to contribute.

Before the announcement of Humayun Saeed as Dr Hasnat in *The Crown*, it was speculated that another heartthrob of the country, Fawad Khan would be or had been cast for the same role. However, the final announcement has put paid to all such speculation, although it came as a minor heartbreak for Fawad Khan fans, leading to a ruckus over social media.

It is assumed that after Humayun Saeed's entry into the flagship series of the world's most watched digital platform, the doors for more Pakistani actors to work in different projects on the same or other global stage would be opened. We also hope that Pakistani talent would take part in these platforms not only on individual level but also on the collective scene if Netflix starts to invest in Pakistan for producing its original projects.



Scent of a Human

Your smell encodes your health, emotional state, and genetic makeup



TTI Report

When we hear about sniffer dogs being used as diagnostic or screening tools for Covid or cancer, the general response is to be wowed by how powerful our canine friends' sense of smell is. But have you ever considered the other implication of such diagnosis – how effective our body odour is in encoding and communicating information about our physical health through smell?

Smell and the sense of smell play very important roles in the biological world. It is smell that marks out mammalian females (with the exception of higher primates) in oestrus, and it is the sense of smell that helps the respective males to find them for mating. Many are kept fed largely by their sense of smell, while many (like, say, skunks) smell to repulse predators.

We humans tend to think little of our own olfactory capabilities – although we use an array of odorants and deodorants in our everyday life. Conventional wisdom and lay literature, based on impressionistic

findings from the 1920s, presents human olfaction as capable of distinguishing between roughly 10,000 unique odours.

However, recent research suggests the average individual is capable of distinguishing over one trillion unique odours. Researchers in a recent study, which tested the psychophysical responses to combinations of over 128 unique odour molecules with combinations composed of up to 30 different component molecules, noted that this estimate is conservative.

Researchers say some human subjects of their research might be capable of deciphering between a thousand trillion odorants, adding that their worst performer could probably still distinguish between 80 million scents.

This clearly demonstrates that the human olfactory system, with its hundreds of different olfactory receptors, far outperforms the other senses in the number of physically different stimuli it can discriminate.

This dovetails nicely into what we know of the olfactory abilities of primates: Some of them are on a par with those of olfactory-dependent mammals such as dogs and rodents. In hindsight, it is easy to visualise how advanced olfactory capacities would have been useful for our distant cousins (and our ancestors) over evolutionary timescale in myriad contexts from social behaviour to food acquisition to predator avoidance.

Even today, smell continues to play more of a role in our lives than we realise. It is well known that our body odour – being the composite of hundreds of volatile organic compounds emitted by the human body – encodes a lot of information about our health and wellbeing.

To start with, the components of these compounds reflect the metabolic condition of the individual concerned. The presence of an infectious or metabolic disease therefore often results in a change in body odour.

Research has shown that disease-specific volatile compounds, acting as olfactory biomarkers of infectious diseases, metabolic diseases, genetic disorders and other kinds of diseases, can be used as diagnostic tools – although their widespread use will require many technological and ethical questions to be answered.

But the story does not end there. There is an expanding body of knowledge that shows human body odours also betray the emotional state of the individual concerned. A 2018 study titled “Interspecies transmission of emotional information via chemosignals: from humans to dogs” shows dogs can detect and differentiate between the emotional conditions of fear and happiness in humans based on body odour.

Scientists say the smell is linked to taste and appetite in the same way emotions are associated with arts. Normal social life requires intense participation of all the five senses in variable proportions, depending on the situation, and the role played by olfaction in this context is often underestimated.

The capacity of the olfactory sense to

modulate human behaviours is tremendous, and it has played determinant roles in the evolution of human habitat, in the way we prepared and consume food, most importantly, our social behaviour.

BBC recently reported yet another study that says men find women’s body odour more pleasant and attractive during the follicular phase of the menstrual cycle, when women are most fertile, and least pleasant and attractive during menstruation.

Research also suggests women find the body odour of men with higher level of testosterone more attractive. Working in tandem, both these tendencies were clearly helpful for our ancient ancestors in prospecting good mates for reproduction.

Still other research showed women’s attraction to men based on body order was proportionate with Human Leukocyte Antigen (HLA) dissimilarity.

HLA is a group of proteins that helps our immune system identify cells that belong to us and cells that are from something or someone else – and are therefore potential pathogens. The gene complex that encodes

for HLA, called MHC, also encodes for some other proteins used in our immune response, and is useful as a shortcut for scientists to see what kind of protections our immune system can offer.

Every individual’s HLA profile is unique, but close relatives’ profiles tend to be similar. Having a child with someone with a dissimilar HLA profile offers a distinct evolutionary advantage: Your children will have a better resistance to pathogens.

The study showed that – incredible as it may sound – women subconsciously preferred men with dissimilar HLA profiles over those with similar HLA profiles to their own.

While it is quite likely that this preference played a role in selection of mates in our evolutionary past, it seems the mechanism does not play any part in matchmaking anymore. Factors like career are social station have precedence over genetic makeup.

For better or for worse, social selection has taken over this function from natural selection among humans.



Pakistan's Year of Cricket Glory Ends in Grand Style

The truckload of laurels scored this year has left Pakistan cricket fans panting for more



By Ali Abdullah

Pakistan cricket's dream run that began with an emphatic win over India in T20 World Cup continued through the end of the year as the Shaheens capped the year by grabbing ICC Annual Awards 2021 in four categories.

Earlier, skipper Babar Azam was named the captain of ICC T20I and ODI team of the year, and multiple other Pakistani players were named in the annual teams of the year for different formats.

Mohammad Rizwan, who put in performance after incredible performance throughout the year, predictably won the ICC T20I Player of the year award. The star wicketkeeper-batsman broke the record of most T20I runs in a calendar year, won multiple man-of-the-match and man-of-the-series awards, and registered his maiden T20I Century. He managed 1326 runs at an average of 73 while dismissing 24 batsmen behind the stumps.

The second player on the list is Pakistan's Skipper Babar Azam, who bagged the ICC ODI Player of the Year Award for scoring 405 runs in six matches at a whopping average of 67. Babar also registered his career-best ODI score when he smashed 158 against England.

The 27-year old's other laurels from the year include dethroning Virat Kohli from the top spot in ODI batsmen rankings and becoming the first Pakistani captain to lead Men in Green to a victory against India in an ICC event. He was also named the captain of the ICC team of the year for demonstrating exceptional leadership skills, leading his side to spectacular victories.

The biggest award of all, the Sir Garfield Trophy for Cricketer of the Year, was won by Shaheen Shah Afridi. He picked up 47 wickets during the year, the most for a pacer in Test cricket. His consistent performance led him to his career-best Test ranking of 3rd best bowler.

Afridi also picked up 31 wickets in white-ball cricket, which made him a top performer across all the formats of the game. The ferocious bowler was declared man of the match for the historic first-ever World Cup win against India. Shaheen's incredible form makes him a worthy recipient of the prestigious cricketer of the year award.

On the women's side, Fatima Sana became the emerging cricketer of the year. Fatima took 24 wickets and scored 165 runs in 16 International matches. She became an integral part

of Pakistan's ODI and T20I women's sides owing to her wicket-taking ability as a bowler, combined with her ability to contribute with the bat down the order when crucial runs are required.

The year 2021 has been one heck of a year for Pakistan cricket. The successes were made all the more sweet by the fact that they came in the face of many challenges, be it the withdrawal of Blackcaps from the tour or cancellation of the England series, right before the ICC T20 World cup.

In hindsight, it would seem the Green-shirts were able to channel the anger and frustration resulting from those setbacks on the field – just as Chairman PCB Ramiz Raja had promised.

After these back-to-back achievements over the past year, it looks like Pakistan Cricket is all set to soar even higher in the coming year. Packed with chart busting performers, the team appears ready to awe the world in all formats of the game.

Pakistan cricket fans are relishing these wins, coming after a long hiatus of international cricket in the country – as reflected by their increased involvement in the sport in 2021. They will now expect the team that raised the bar to deliver on that promise in 2022 and beyond.

Why are Officials Lukewarm to Raja's Quadrangular T20I Tournament?

Cricket fans are fascinated by the idea and markets are bound to be bullish on it, but what about the officialdom?

By Shahmir Niazi

Cricket fans around the world are certainly intrigued by the idea, and there is little doubt the markets will be secretly salivating at the huge revenue potential such an initiative can unleash. But cricket officials' response to Pakistani cricket chief Ramiz Raja's idea of starting a quadrangular T20I fixture involving Pakistan, India, England, and Australia appear lukewarm at best for now.

The Pakistan Cricket Board's (PCB) Chairman recently tweeted he would propose a quadrangular T20I tournament between Pakistan, Australia, India, and England.

With the three top-ranked sides and Australia coming face-to-face with each other in the annual tournament, massive revenue for International Cricket Council (ICC) can be generated, he opined.

However, ICC Chief Executive Geoff Allardice seemed to cold-shoulder the idea at a recent media outing when he declined to comment on it saying there had been no official correspondence on the subject.

"We have not had any correspondence or communication with Ramiz Raja regarding any of the ideas", Allardice told reporters. "Till we get more detail on what he is thinking, it is hard to comment. At this stage, we have had no communication with Ramiz Raja regarding his idea."

While explaining his rationale, Raja said that since Ashes and India-Pakistan matches attract immense viewership, nothing can go wrong if the four sides come and play together. He believes, "it could be a great comeback of sorts for international cricket as a challenge to franchise cricket."

Cricket fans have turned to franchise cricket in recent years due to the competitive nature of the tournament with stars from all cricketing sides demonstrating their talents, as opposed to bilateral series that attract interest mostly in the playing countries' fans.



Raja said the ICC need to whet the fans' appetite as they are getting fatigued, and we need to create something outside the Future Tours Programs (FTP). "It could be a financial and viewing bonanza as there would be numerous little battles like Pakistan-India and Ashes rivalry (England-Australia) within such a competition," he added.

The PCB chief plans to pitch at the meeting of the ICC board scheduled for March the idea as an alternative to the bilateral series model, which he believes is financially draining for both the cricketing nations and the ICC.

A revamped financial model that is based on the pooling of resources and sharing of revenues is required for the growth of the game. "My view is that a new structure based on pooling and sharing of income should be formed," Raja said.

While elaborating his view, he listed a few changes that ought to be made in the financial structure of the ICC. PCB Chief said: "The idea is to register a company that works under the ICC and has a dedicated Chief Executive Officer regulating the entire financial model, with the income divided among all the members." This company will administer the affairs of the four-nation super series.

Raja is not in favour of the bilateral T20I series as he believes it to be fatiguing both for the players and the fans. "I am not a big fan of bilateral T20 series as T20I cricket needs a new life amid the challenges around franchise cricket," he said, adding that "playing five bilateral T20Is is tedious, but if three or four nations play each other rather than bilateral series - that has a massive potential in terms of generating revenue."

He dismissed the impression of creating a bloc on the pattern of the Big Three which comprises Australia, England, and India. "It's not like we need to create a parallel body like the Big Four, but it's about generating interest and the income can go to the other boards too," he explained.

Although Raja has taken the initiative for the greater good of the game and is mindful of the fans' frustration over the lack of international cricket tournaments, it's difficult to predict if his brainchild will materialise.

In a packed global cricket calendar, particularly for the big teams like India, Australia, and England, finding a window is not easy. But Raja, the 1992 World Cup-winning player, said it would be a shame if one can't find a window for such an event. "If you can't find a window for this, then cricket is doomed, sorry," he declared.

Pakistan Winter Sports Incubator in the Making

Already a mecca for mountaineers and trekkers from across the world, northern Pakistan is now developing its winter sports potential



By Pavan Manzoor

Pakistan is known around the world for its interesting cities, archaeological sites, historical landmarks, hospitality, and delicious cuisine. Most foreigners, however, are unaware that it is an equally fantastic place for adventure sports as well as cultural celebrations.

The northern areas of Pakistan are famous as a hub for adventure sports and offer fantastic opportunities for visitors and sportsmen. River rafting, canoeing, sailing, and kayaking are all popular water sports along the rivers that flow down from the snowcapped mountains and glaciers.

Gilgit, Hunza, Shandur, Sust, and Skardu are some of the places where you can go on a jeep safari. Water sports are available on the rivers Chitral, Indus, Gilgit, Swat, Hunza, Kunar, and Neelum. There are mountains with amazing hiking treks that lead to some beautiful places.

Swat is also referred to as Pakistan's Switzerland, where Pakistan's top ski resort Malam Jabba is situated. If a Jeep Safari is what thrills you, there is probably no place more interesting than northern Pakistan.

Mountaineers from all over the world continue to test their minds and bodies by conquering some of the toughest terrains in the world. Mountaineering is a highly specialised sport, particularly on the 8,000-meter high mountain peaks found in Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan (GB) area, home to five of the world's fabled eight-thousanders – K-2, Nanga Parbat, G-I & II, and Broad Peak.

Pakistan is home to 70 percent of the world's mountain peaks above 7,000 metres high. Every winter, some of the world's greatest mountaineers flock to northern Pakistan to climb these summits, pushing the boundaries of what is thought to be humanly feasible.

In the area of mountaineering, Pakistan has produced legends such as Nazir Sabir, the first Pakistani to summit Everest; Muhammad Ali Sadpara, the first Pakistani to summit Nanga Parbat in the winter; and his son Hasan Sadpara.

In the field of rock climbing, Pakistan has a great potential. Although unlike mountaineering, rock climbing is no less exciting as a recreational activity. In fact it is probably one of the most difficult and dangerous form of extreme sports.

The season which attracts mountain climbers and mountaineers from all over the world opens up plenty of opportunities for mountaineering-related businesses in Pakistan and helps the country generate millions in revenues from taxes and fees each year.

Due to extreme weather conditions, particularly during the winter, living for common people in northern Pakistan is extremely difficult. The Pakistani government has built several lodges along popular routes and improved services, which has attracted more tourists to visit. The process for foreigners to get tourist visas in Pakistan has been eased significantly.

There are a few suggestions that can help to make these games more attractive. International federations must provide funds to help improve the lives of the people living in Pakistan's northern areas. The doors of President and PM houses should be opened for national and international mountaineers who summit main peaks their achievements should be publicised in the national media.

The government should make this adventure sports a key priority. An international

level professional mountaineering school and a trained rescue squad of experts are required. The Alpine Club of Pakistan (ACP) should be strengthened. There is a need for the ACP to become a more active organisation that promotes and mainstreams climbing in Pakistan while also attracting overseas climbers and trekkers.

Government and state departments should devote more attention to removing any administrative and logistical bottlenecks and to generally facilitating trekking expeditions.

Hunza Winter Sports - Girls Playing Ice Hockey

Hunza and Gilgit sound like worlds unto themselves, far distant from Pakistan's major urban centres. This, however, is not the case. While these locations may be far away, Pakistan takes pride in its values, culture, and history. They represent a positive image of Pakistan that the rest of the world needs to see.

The Hunza Annual Sports Festival is a part of that. What began as a fun pastime has evolved into a celebration that is also a popular tourist attraction. Hunza's youth

are passionate about sports. They began playing ice hockey on village grounds three years ago. The activity has since caught on to attract national attention.

These days, the season is in full swing, and Hunza's girls are competing in an ice hockey match. In a heart-warming gesture of kindness and sporting spirit, the Canadian High Commissioner serves as the game's referee. Wendy Gilmour praised the competitive nature of both girls and boys participating in ice hockey.

The federal government has woken up to ice hockey's potential, and is taking steps to ensure holistic, community-centred development of the sport. The world at large is also taking note of the sportsmanship of the youth of Hunza.

The people of Hunza are passionate about sports of all kinds and they encourage the children to follow in their footsteps and achieve the goals they were born to achieve. Ice hockey has become their favourite sport of Hunza's youth almost overnight. Local players have made it to the national team as a result of their devotion and hard work.

Girls from Hunza have in particular demonstrated admirable spirit, persever-

ance, and grit in athletics. There is no reason why, given the opportunity, they should not do Pakistan proud at the global level in ice hockey as well.

Last week, the first five-day national ice sports competitions concluded in Ghulkin village of the Upper Hunza area. The tourney saw twenty teams of men and women from northern Pakistan as well from the rest of the country compete in ice skating, ice hockey, ice football, and ice polo competitions.

This was the second such tourney in the area this winter, the first being the Karakoram Winterlude-4 competition, involving ice hockey, ice climbing, and mountain cycling among other winter sports. The success of these events showcases the potential for the development winter festival in northern Pakistan, which could one day attract participants and spectators from right across the world.

Pakistan Winter Sports Federation, which helped stage these events working along with local clubs, will do well to institute a multiyear development program to slowly build the stature of these events with a view to one day aggregating them into a spectacular Pakistan Winter Festival.





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